

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN CIVIL WAR LITERATURE

This book is the first omnibus history of the literature of the American Civil War, the deadliest conflict in U.S. history. *A History of American Civil War Literature* examines the way the war has been remembered and rewritten over time. This history incorporates new directions in Civil War historiography and cultural studies while giving equal attention to writings from both the northern and the southern states. Written by leading scholars in the field, this book works to redefine the boundaries of American Civil War literature while posing a fundamental question: Why does this 150-year-old conflict continue to capture the American imagination?

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*For Kathleen Diffley,
Dean of Civil War Literary Studies*

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Preface

There can be little doubt about ongoing scholarly and popular interest in the American Civil War. More than 150 years after Appomattox, readers throughout the Anglophone world remain riveted by studies of and stories about this great internecine conflict. Indeed, estimates suggest that there have been 60,000 Civil War–related books or pamphlets published since 1865. That is a publication rate of a book a day, every day, since the cessation of hostilities. As with the “founding fathers” and Shakespeare, there is a robust publishing industry at work here, one that ensures that the Civil War is never far from mind.

Not surprisingly, then, literary representations of the war are an obsession for critics and lay readers alike. For instance, the Civil War poetry of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Herman Melville are mainstays in high school and college curricula, while postwar narratives such as Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936), and Shelby Foote’s *The Civil War: A Narrative* (1958–1974) prove “steady sellers” decade after decade. This is to say nothing of contemporary writers like Geraldine Brooks, E.L. Doctorow, and Natasha Trethewey, who continue to produce new literature about the war well into the twenty-first century.

In response to this seemingly ceaseless literary boom, scholars from a number of disciplines – English, history, American studies, and southern studies, to name a few – have produced a lively and at times contentious critical conversation about that literature. Yet, despite perpetual interest in literary representations of the conflict, this volume is the first omnibus history of the literature of the American Civil War. It also provides an uncommon opportunity to redefine the boundaries of that literature and rethink its place in American culture.

The twenty-two essays that follow make at least three key contributions to the current scholarship. First, rather than simply restate the age-old consensus about the American Civil War and its literature, this volume’s

essays take account of new directions in Civil War historiography and cultural studies. For instance, several of the essays emphasize the transnational and transatlantic aspects of this purported “war between brothers.” By emphasizing the ways that the conflict implicated nations other than or in addition to the United and Confederate States, the volume expands the mental map on which the American Civil War is played out. Too often this bloody struggle has been read in provincial terms, as a mostly domestic dispute in a “house divided.” But as writers like Don H. Doyle, Amanda Foreman, Howard Jones, Paul Quigley, Peter Rawlings, and Kathleen Diffley have shown, at any number of moments the American Civil War threatened to become an international conflict, one into which Mexico, France, England, and others might well have been drawn.¹

Similarly, *A History of American Civil War Literature* embodies an emergent fascination with Civil War memory – that is, how the war has been remembered over time – which became a hot topic following the publication of David W. Blight’s magisterial *Race and Reunion* (2001). Enlivened by theories of collective or cultural memory, a new generation of historians have turned their attention to the sometimes vexed and always muddy relations between history and memory. This has resulted in exciting new work on the memory of specific Civil War events or people; reburial efforts, monuments, and statuary; memorial holidays and reenactment culture. Needless to say, literature has played an outsize role in these reconstructions of Civil War memory.² After all, the convergence of history and memory is the subject of a great deal of literature, as the subsequent chapters on realism, postwar memoir, Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Natasha Trethewey argue.

The second key contribution of *A History of American Civil War Literature* involves its representation of southern literary cultures. Put simply, southern literature has gotten short shrift in previous works of literary history. Take, for example, the three best studies of Civil War literature in the past half century: Edmund Wilson’s *Patriotic Gore* (1962), Daniel Aaron’s *The Unwritten War* (1973), and Randall Fuller’s *From Battlefields Rising* (2011), all of which give disproportionate attention to northern writers. (Another classic study, George M. Frederickson’s *The Inner Civil War* [1965], betrays its commitments in its subtitle: “Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union.”)³ Such critical neglect is in keeping with a commonplace assumption about the paucity of Confederate literature and a general dubiousness about the strength of southern nationalism.

Yet recent studies by Gary Gallagher, Anne Sarah Rubin, Michael T. Bernath, and Coleman Hutchison, among others, refute that paucity

and confirm the strength of Confederate cultural nationalism.⁴ Indeed, the relative success of Confederate cultural nationalists to produce a “native literature” is, Bernath notes, “startling, almost unbelievable,” particularly in light of the various scarcities and shortages they faced (152). Thus, while one must acknowledge Wilson, Aaron, and Fuller’s respective, prodigious achievements, it is time to look again at the literature produced in the South before, during, and after the war. Moreover, it is time to tell a complete story about how literature helped shape the coming of the war, its outcome and its memory, on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. To this end, the present volume shuttles back and forth between the North and the South, striving to find balance between Union and Confederate texts. Indeed, of the ten figures treated in Part III, five were or are self-described southerners.

The two tenses in the previous sentence signal the final key contribution of *A History of American Civil War Literature*: it employs a capacious definition of “American Civil War Literature.” Although the Civil War era is the primary focus of this history, it also considers antebellum contexts and postbellum genres. More to the point, while the first seven figures treated in Part III lived through the Civil War, the final three, William Faulkner (1897–1962), Robert Penn Warren (1905–1989), and Natasha Trethewey (1966–), experienced the conflict from an increasing historical distance. Yet these twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers also produced “Civil War literature.” Indeed, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961), and *Native Guard* (2006) remain three of the most urgent meditations on the ongoing relevance of the war. Thus, through its expanded historical scope, this volume brings us back to those 60,000 books or pamphlets. It also begins to answer one of the most perplexing questions in Civil War studies: Why does this 150-year-old conflict continue to capture the imagination?

The tripartite structure of *A History of American Civil War Literature* allows readers multiple ways to approach to that question. Rather than adhere to a strict chronological order – antebellum, bellum, postbellum – the essays are arranged under the categories “Contexts,” “Genres,” and “Figures.” This organization encourages readers to see connections among the individual essays and to consider issues of historical contingency, literary form, and author function. Part I draws on an older, more literary definition of the word *context*: “the parts which immediately precede or follow any particular passage or ‘text’ and determine its meaning.”⁵ While the essays included in Part I address the periods that immediately preceded and followed the American Civil War, their primary interest is in

seeing how those periods helped determine the meanings of the conflict. This cluster of essays reveals, for instance, antebellum tensions between abolitionist and secessionist print cultures, as well as stark differences between northern and southern publishing industries. Similarly, the cluster also weighs the literary legacies of the war, emphasizing the profound effect the conflict had on several generations of writers, both foreign and domestic.

Part II acknowledges the importance of genre to nineteenth-century conceptions of the literary. In canvassing a far-from-exhaustive list of genres, these essays limn the variety of modes through which the Civil War has been represented. Taken together, the essays also intimate the multiple audiences addressed by that literature. As suggested by the chapters on popular poetry and song, children's literature, and diaries, Civil War literature often troubled traditional hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Thus, genre emerges from this cluster as a powerful interpretive tool, one that helps us make sense of the diverse and diffuse cultural work undertaken by these literary texts.

Part III, with its litany of "Figures," seems like the most traditional of the three sections. (In fact, this portion of the volume is reminiscent of Wilson's *Patriotic Gore* and Aaron's *The Unwritten War*, both of which are organized by literary figures.) However, the essays in this section distinguish themselves with the scope of their inquiries. Nearly all of these figures had or have had long writing careers. This fact allows contributors to gauge how literary projects change in relation to cataclysmic historical events (as in the essays on Walt Whitman and Herman Melville) and what happens when writers revisit such events again and again throughout their lives (as in the essays on Mary Boykin Chesnut, William Faulkner, and Robert Penn Warren).

That sort of recurrence – a nearly compulsive returning to the events of 1861–1865 – is, finally, a defining characteristic of the literature and culture of the United States more broadly. Literary representations of the deadliest war in U.S. history have helped several generations of readers define American identity and interrogate American ideals. Civil War literature has also served to remind readers how far the country has come since the abolition of slavery – and how much work there is left to do. More urgently, the literature of the American Civil seems to speak to something fundamental in generation after generation of readers, via an elusive, humanistic, and eventually affective appeal. Robert Penn Warren surely had that appeal in mind when he wrote in the first year of the Civil War Centennial that

The Civil War is our only “felt” history – history lived in the national imagination. This is not to say that the War is always, and by all men, felt in the same way. Quite the contrary. But this fact is an index to the very complexity, depth, and fundamental significance of the event. It is an overwhelming and vital image of human and national experience.⁶

The following pages show just how important literature has been to the representation of that image. They also suggest that literature will continue to shape the ways readers think and feel about the American Civil War for several generations to come.

Notes

- 1 Don H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010); Howard Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Peter Rawlings and Kathleen Diffley, eds., “Writing the Civil War: Transnational Dimensions,” a special issue of *Comparative American Studies* 3 (September 2007).
- 2 For instance, Blight relies heavily on literary sources (broadly conceived) in both *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) and *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), a fascinating study of the Civil War Centennial (1961–1965) and the ways that Robert Penn Warren, Bruce Catton, Edmund Wilson, and James Baldwin brought the Civil War era into close conversation with the Civil Rights era. See also Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds., *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and Martin Griffin, *Ashes of the Mind: War and Memory in Northern Literature, 1865–1900* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).
- 3 Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1973); Randall Fuller, *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
- 4 Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle*

for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Coleman Hutchison, *Apples and Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Context,” def. 4a.

⁶ Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 4.

PART I

Contexts

Harriet Beecher Stowe and the “Book That Made This Great War”

Judie Newman

“So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!” Lincoln’s greeting to Harriet Beecher Stowe at their meeting on 2 December 1862 has become a commonplace of literary scholarship. The reference is to the colossal impact of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* – a global best seller and the first American novel to sell more than a million copies – and is supported by a number of indices: frenzied Southern attempts to counter its portrayal of slavery in a plethora of “Anti-Tom” novels; children’s versions; dramatic adaptations leading to the growth of “Tom troupes” who performed nothing else; and the abundance of what we would today call “tie-ins”: Topsy dolls, board games, Staffordshire figurines, wallpaper, sheet music, and even socks. In the run-up to the Civil War it was possible to read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* yourself, read it in abridged form to your children, see it on stage, weep over it into an Uncle Tom handkerchief, and recover over supper on an Uncle Tom plate. But did it cause the war? Daniel R. Vollaro has demonstrated that Lincoln’s greeting is entirely apocryphal. The story persists partly because it reflects well on Lincoln and Stowe as kindred abolitionists, despite the initially moderate antislavery stance of both, in an intellectual climate where we are eager “to make literature a lever of social or political change”.¹

Was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* inflammatory? Or did it set out to promote union and moderation? Arguments have been made on both sides. Vollaro finds the influence of the novel in sparking the war difficult to prove. Most abolition leaders said comparatively little about it, especially the Garrisonians, and there were negative Northern reviews, although the invective from the South was unrestrained. (Stowe received death threats and was sent a severed slave ear in the post.) Mob violence against abolitionism was commonplace in the North, and many Americans remained ambivalent about slavery right up to the outbreak of war. Vollaro is persuasive but unfortunately confines his arguments to the novel *per se*, something of a straw target. He asks, “In what sense does a novel have

the power to move a people to battle?"² On the other side of the argument David S. Reynolds emphasizes the enormous authority of public opinion in America, and the extent to which Stowe molded it, redefining American democracy on a more egalitarian basis and aiming to rectify social injustice by offering fairness and improvement for marginalized groups. Reynolds argues that the novel was successful precisely because it appeared fairly conventional, exploiting elements of many different popular genres, appealing to religion, temperance, and antislavery interests, and particularly going a long way to winning Christianity for the antislavery cause. Arguably *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is less a novel than an anthology of nineteenth-century popular genres, including captivity narrative, jeremiad, spiritual biography, Gothic, the "dying child" story, tales of adventure, sermon, and temperance tale.³ As Reynolds argues, its great popularity can be attributed largely to the fact that it advocated controversial, sometimes subversive reforms without straying into the merely sensational or the openly transgressive.⁴

The novel may be a "three-handkerchief" tearjerker – in 1852, Congressman Horace Greeley cried so hard over it on a railway journey from Boston to Washington that he had to get off in Springfield and spend a night in a hotel to recover – but there is in fact no sensation-mongering. The abused and sexually trafficked women remain pious, domestic, and ladylike, with the abuse in the past, offstage, or merely potential. Northerners are the worst slaveholders (Legree) and Southerners offer the most trenchant critiques of the peculiar institution (Augustine St. Clare). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* attacked the system of slavery, not individuals or sectional interests. This moderation was essential in a novel that mounted a direct challenge to American law. Stowe wrote in reaction to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which, by making it illegal to assist an escaped slave, effectively transformed the whole of the United States into a slaveholding nation. She set out to defend instead the "Higher Law," that of natural justice supported by morality and God. In an early incident in the novel (chapter IX) the wife of Senator Bird (who has just voted for the Fugitive Slave Law) appeals for his assistance in helping Eliza escape from slavery. In his wife's instant recourse to her Bible, Senator Bird is squarely confronted with the Higher Law argument, and soon finds himself out in the rain in the middle of the night transporting Eliza to safety. Obedience to God is what counts for Mrs. Bird, not the recently passed law.

It is often forgotten that in its first, newspaper appearance, the aim of the novel was to promote union rather than to attack the South. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was designed to reach out to a Southern audience through

serial publication in the *National Era*. The paper was explicitly antislavery, but its editor, Gamaliel Bailey, had been chosen because of his diplomacy and moderation, and his view that Southerners could be persuaded that slavery was more than a sectional issue.⁵ Stowe carefully emphasized the goodness of Southern planters in an attempt to use the tactics of "moral suasion" and bring North and South together. The novel begins with the relatively benign Shelbys in Kentucky, moves on to Augustine St. Clare's lax household in New Orleans, and only at the close homes in on the horrors of the field hands' labor on Legree's plantation. The intention was not to attack the South but to attack slavery. Augustine St. Clare emphasizes that "The thing itself is the essence of all abuse!"⁶ Stowe pointed out that she had known slaveholders who were otherwise just, upright, and generous:

She felt that justice required that their difficulties should be recognised and their virtues acknowledged. It was her object to show that the evils of slavery were the inherent evils of a bad system, and not always the fault of those who had become involved in it.⁷

The objective was to convince readers that abolition was a Christian inevitability rather than the belief only of fanatics.⁸ Stowe expected abolitionists to condemn the book as too mild, and Southerners to accept it as a fair representation.⁹ The result, of course was quite the reverse.

The *National Era* was highly significant in other respects, particularly in building Stowe's enormous reader base, and in embedding the novel right into the middle of political discourse. Launched in 1847 as the organ of the American and Foreign Antislavery Society, it had some 17,000 subscribers in 1851, which the serial raised to 19,000 in 1852 and 28,000 in 1853.¹⁰ Even so, publishers were wary of printing an antislavery novel. None had ever made a profit before. The firm of Phillips, Sampson turned it down, and John P. Jewett, a small publisher, only took it on at the insistence of his wife, publishing it ten days before the serial itself ended. Jewett, an astute promoter, ran a big pre-launch campaign with heavy advertising, used the sales figures to promote the book, made much of the book reviews, and encouraged international responses. Stowe sent out copies (to Dickens, Prince Albert, and Lord Carlisle, among others) and wrote different prefaces for the British, French, and German editions. Bailey meanwhile reported its success as a news item and sold copies from his offices. Almost as important as its mobilization of the antislavery cause, the novel also helped overcome prejudices against fiction itself. As Barbara Hochman has demonstrated, the novel is full of images of reading

and establishes a protocol in which readers are thoughtful, engaged, and imaginative. Tom has a well-marked Bible and is an active reader; slave literacy restores agency and subjectivity to the slave; the scenes of Bible reading help legitimize the novel for readers who would not normally approve of fiction. Where Garrison's *Liberator*, *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* printed fiction at the back of their issues, the *Era* put it in a prominent position on the front page, not separated from the other content but interlaced with political speeches, readers' letters, congressional debates, and news. Usually fiction in abolitionist papers was a form of light relief from the cause. Here by creating a dialogue with the texts that surrounded it, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reshaped the relation between fiction and the network of ideas and images within which it was embedded.¹¹

That network was also essentially in tune with the ideas of the Free Soil party. Michael D. Pierson has argued that Stowe should be located at the center of Free Soil political ideology.¹² Where Free Soil men tended to favor the slow disappearance of slavery, Free Soil women adopted arguments for immediate emancipation and focused on the moral issues of enslaving women and separating families. The men could thus look moderate and constitutional while the women advanced the cause in more radical ways. Of course, gender ideologies were often deployed in service of politics. The Republican Party, for example, cast their opponents as too aristocratic and hierarchical for an egalitarian America, and portrayed Democratic conservative views of gender as part of that hierarchical outlook. After she finished the serial, Stowe continued to write for the *Era* as a regular contributor. Bailey supported Free Soil presidential candidate John P. Hale in the 1852 campaign. Arguably, therefore, the moderation of the novel's purpose did not prevent its thorough saturation in and penetration of a political network, as well as its extension to an unprecedented range of readers. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was read by people like Lewis Tappan and James G. Birney who never read novels on principle. Lord Palmerston, who had not read a novel for thirty years, read it three times. The Shakers, for whom fiction reading was forbidden, had it read aloud to them in 1852. In this regard, the paratextual material was also cunningly deployed. Illustrations linked the book to images of the Bible and the advertisements referred to it as "a work," "a book," "a volume," or "a narrative" – anything but a novel. And for those who still hungered after facts, not fiction, Stowe swiftly produced *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), substantiating her portrayal of slavery with plenty of documentary evidence.

The novel was very affordable; the cheap edition, "For the Millions," retailed at 37.5 cents. But for those who could not afford even that, or who could not read, there were the plays, which extended *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* impact to the lower classes en masse. Three months before the serial ended, the first dramatic adaptations appeared, often with happy endings (invented in the absence of any contribution from Stowe herself.) At the National Theatre in New York, the audience was lower class and not at all antislavery in its sympathies, and much has been made of their conversion from roughnecks who came to laugh at stereotypical minstrel antics to a weeping mob, hissing at Legree and cheering for Eliza. The play ran at the National for nine months and was performed fifteen times a week (three times in the morning, six in the afternoon, and six in the evening), after which the Howard troupe toured it to eastern and midwestern cities and then took it to London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. (There were at least twenty separate versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* onstage in London between 1852 and 1855.) The *Key* was dramatized in 1853 at the Troy Museum, with special trains running to the venue from Vermont and Massachusetts. The twenty-one different productions of Stowe's *Dred* also brought in the crowds.¹³

In terms of influence, it is worth noting that a slave narrative might take two or three years to sell as many copies to individuals whom a theater could seat in two nights. In New York, Purdy's held 2,500 people, the Bowery 3,000; in London, the Victoria held 2,000 in the gallery alone. Admittedly, some of these adaptations introduced material that was not in the novels, was racist, or offered compromises with slavery. It is easy to discount versions in which Eva ascended to heaven on wires, the cast performed on ice or on horseback, or the actress playing Eliza had to hurl pieces of meat behind her to induce a pack of bloodhounds to pursue her. Nonetheless *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was often the only play a nineteenth-century American ever saw. The plays also reveal just how inherently incendiary their subject matter was. Dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* frequently provoked audience riots. The Howard company narrowly averted a riot in Baltimore, purely because the audience were unwilling to boo the child star, Little Cordelia Howard, but when cast members, some of them Southerners, began to wear badges supporting secession, a mini civil war broke out in the troupe itself.¹⁴

These dramatic versions also demonstrate the fundamental misapprehension of critics who argue that Stowe somehow caused the Civil War – or indeed that she did not. Both arguments rely on the notion that the war was a defined event, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. In

fact, the war was under way already, an unstoppable development. Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself, where the novel had already had an influence on dramatic adaptations before it had been completed as a serial or actually produced as a printed volume, the war was already in process when the novel was published, and continued well into the future. As Arna Bontemps argued, slavery was "a state of war."¹⁵ Bontemps, for example, quite unapologetically depicted the 1839 Amistad rebellion as involving retributive acts of aggression (the killing of crew members by the former slaves). John Stauffer has argued that small civil wars broke out even before Fort Sumter in April 1861, when slave catchers tried to arrest fugitives in Boston or Pennsylvania, and especially in the Kansas-Nebraska conflict, which culminated across the country in John Brown's Harper Ferry raid.¹⁶ Lincoln's greeting clearly referred to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but in her second antislavery novel, *Dred*, Stowe focused on the question of the extension of slavery and "Bleeding Kansas."¹⁷ In 1854, the Nebraska-Kansas Bill created two new territories, Nebraska and Kansas, with local options on slavery. In 1855, when Kansas held its election, the pro-slavery camp resorted to vigilante tactics, sending in 5,000 supporters from Missouri, barring "Free Soil" men from voting, and electing a pro-slavery legislature. In 1856, another band of Missourians plundered and burned the "Free Soil" town of Lawrence, Kansas. Essentially what was at stake in Kansas was the possibility of the institutional extension of slavery to the whole of the United States. By the mid-1850s, America was in the midst of a racial conflict and had been for a considerable time.

Stowe placed this conflict in the all-encompassing Judeo-Christian time scheme, in keeping with her perfectionist beliefs.¹⁸ Essentially perfectionists believed that before the coming of Christ, man was enslaved to sin, but that Christ had created a new Covenant, liberating man from that slavery. In the Old Testament, the whole universe was ordered according to a master-slave relationship. But slavery violated the spirit of the New Covenant because it is based on force, not love. All the Biblical references deployed by the pro-slavery camp were irrelevant; they belonged to the Old Covenant. The central scenes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are based on this belief. Augustine St. Clare describes his Christian mother telling him of a future millennium when "all men should be free and happy" (344). He himself looks forward to "a mustering among the masses, the world over" (344). According to perfectionist theology, the underclasses would inevitably move toward freedom, and to repress them could only lead to violent – and futile – upheaval. For Stowe, therefore, Lincoln's election was not the result of political maneuvering, but the product of the social

upheaval generated by an oppressive society. A revolution was already in train, which would lead to the establishment of a truly Christian society. Joan Hedrick has argued that looking toward Armageddon on the part of perfectionists helped set the stage for the Civil War, and that Stowe saw it as "the last struggle for liberty."¹⁹ Stowe certainly detected the movement of revolutionary forces in current events. In the *New York Independent* she said that "John Brown is a witness slain in the great cause which is shaking Hungary, Austria, Italy, France; and his death will be mightier for that cause than even his success. The cross is the way to the throne."²⁰ Thus, the American Civil War was merely one part of a global struggle. Stowe changed her original subtitle from "The Man Who Was a Thing" to "Life Among the Lowly," putting slaves and lower classes together in one group.

As a result, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the war between masters and slaves, Old and New Covenants, is cast in terms of aristocrat versus democrat. In the novel, Augustine has a twin brother, Alfred, who resembles their father who was "a born aristocrat" (344) and "[a] regular old Roman" (333). Augustine characterizes his twin as "as determined a despot as ever walked" (340), who believes only in the law of the strongest and is convinced that there must be a lower class, "confined to an animal nature" (340). In *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe explicitly described the two brothers as representing the two classes of men, the aristocrat and the democrat. The former, although potentially just, generous, and humane to those he considers his equals, is in her view entirely insensible to the humanity of the lower orders.²¹ The democrat, in contrast, does acknowledge a common humanity, and examples like Augustine may be found in the South, perfectly able to see through the sophistry of slavery. Stowe argued that the aristocrat by position was not always so by nature, and vice versa; and that the democrat by nature did acknowledge "the sacredness of a common humanity."²² In the *Key* she allowed that "man is par excellence an oppressive animal," but held that after Christ's coming, all institutions were based on love:²³

The relation of master and servant . . . was refined into a voluntary relation between two equal brethren, in which the servant faithfully performed his duties as to the Lord, and the master gave him full compensation for his services.²⁴

Similarly, in *Men of Our Times* (1868) Stowe offered a series of biographies of eminent men, introducing them by asserting that the Civil War had not shattered the Republic but made it stronger because of its Christian, democratic nature as "the only permanent republic which ever based

itself upon the principles laid down by Jesus Christ, of the absolute equal brotherhood of men, and the rights of man as the simple ground of manhood.”²⁵ For Stowe, all the working classes of Europe were on her side, including the laborers of Manchester and Birmingham and the silk weavers of Lyon, whereas the other side included all those who were holders of privileges and who sympathized with the South as a struggling aristocracy. God had therefore chosen Lincoln as his instrument with a particular appropriateness, “with a visible reference to the rights and interests of the great majority of mankind, for which he stood.”²⁶ To hear Stowe tell it, Lincoln was a man of the laboring classes, and his election was a sign “to all who live by labor that their day is coming.”²⁷ The Civil War was therefore part of a longer, global upheaval, already in process, and its result ultimately inevitable.

Nevertheless, Stowe did not assume that the millennial victory would be swift or easy, or that despotism would yield lightly to love. She advances this interpretation of events most clearly in chapter XXIII, “Henrique.” The visit of Alfred and his son Henrique to the Saint Clare household is absolutely central to the novel, as its position close to the middle of the novel emphasizes. The chapter marks the turning point for Eva, whose death is appreciably hastened if not actually caused by the visit. The two brothers are introduced as representing a house divided, “opposites on every point, yet a mysterious tie seemed to unite them in a closer friendship than ordinary” (387). They have a vigorous exchange of views about slavery and revolution, but then swap it for a more harmless contest, a game of backgammon. The scene clearly suggests that North and South may differ but could still come together. Henrique is like his father, “a noble, dark-eyed, princely boy” (387). The characterization of Augustine (brought up in the North for his health) as Greek and fair and Alfred, the plantation owner, as dark and imperially Roman reinforces their opposition, but the flattering connection to classical civilization avoids criminalizing the South as in any way exceptional in its views. This is, finally, one more example of the opposition of aristocracy to democracy. Can South and North be brought together? The exchange of views between Augustine and Alfred puts them at opposite ends of the political spectrum. But is there a possibility of avoiding the coming conflict by love, figured here in the projected union of their two children, Eva and Henrique? Henrique is a twelve-year-old who already believes in force: he mercilessly whips his slave Dodo, and is completely astounded by Eva’s Christian argument that as the Bible tells them to love everybody, so they must love their slaves. Augustine clearly hopes to promote a match between the cousins; he plans

a reciprocal visit to his brother's plantation (416), but by that time it is too late and Eva is dying.

While the two children take a pony ride, Augustine and Alfred engage in debate. Augustine's arguments are squarely perfectionist: "if there is anything that is revealed with the strength of a divine law in our times, it is that the masses are to rise, and the under class become the upper one" (392). Alfred mocks him and his Biblical references, tells him he has the makings of a "circuit rider" (393), an itinerant preacher, and argues that the working classes must be kept down: "they shall never get the upper hand" (391). He would rather die than witness "this millennium of your greasy masses" (392). St. Clare's father thought of Africans as "an intermediate link between man and animals" (335) and compromised with the evils of slavery in the belief that "We can't have perfection" (336). In the incident that opens the chapter, Dodo is the link between Henrique and his horse and is treated as an animal by Henrique. As a recently acquired slave, Dodo is being "broken in," just as Henrique might break in an untamed horse. Questions of self-control and brutalization are then transferred to the larger political stage. Augustine, in the belief that all men are born free and equal and that a rising of the laboring and the slave classes is inevitable, cites the examples of the French and Haitian Revolutions, and argues that treating slaves as animals will make them even more dangerous when the inevitable rising occurs. Henrique's behavior demonstrates both the impossibility of educating children in moral terms in a slave system and the effects of slavery on the masters, who are brutalized by power: "They that cannot govern themselves cannot govern others" (393). Ironically, then, Alfred's body language escapes from his control, as he peremptorily dismisses his brother's arguments in short, declarative sentences, full of unfounded assertions and forceful ejaculations. "Stuff! – nonsense" he exclaims, "setting his foot hard down as if he were standing on somebody" (391). "This subject race," said he, stamping firmly, "is down and shall stay down!" (393). Like a horse, Alfred tends to snort and paw the ground. While he proclaims the superiority of his Anglo-Saxon pedigree, his body language places him lower down the scale. Augustine, on the other hand, is logical, well informed, and wins the argument on paper, but he is absolutely ineffectual in changing Alfred's views or, by implication, the system of slavery.

But what of the two children? While the modern reader may wonder if Stowe simply kills off Eva, like many angelic Victorian heroines, to save her from "a fate worse than death" – carnal knowledge – things are rather more complicated. The focus of the chapter is on Eva's womanhood in relation

to slavery. Can love rein in despotism? Or is a woman, once married, also a slave? If Henrique and Eva had married, could she have protected his slaves? The law would have given her no power to save them from abuse. Even here, she does not intervene as Dodo is beaten; moreover, her arguments fall on decidedly deaf ears until the close of the chapter, when Henrique (flushed and clearly smitten by her charms) does appear to be converted, if only temporarily, to the need for Christian love. Stowe unashamedly emphasizes the erotic potential of the meeting of the two cousins, in fairly obvious symbolism. Pure, unsullied Eva, on a white pony, returns from her ride with her cousin (on a black pony that has recently rolled in dirt), flushed, panting and breathing hard, declaring that she quite forgot to be careful because she was enjoying herself so much. Throughout the ages, the horse has been a conventional symbol of the passions, with control of the horse a code for self-control and the ability to master baser desires. Henrique, tempestuous and with no self-control, wielding his whip mercilessly, features as a future demon bridegroom. Two days later Eva's health has begun to fail rapidly, overstimulated by Henrique's visit. Uncle Tom tells Ophelia that he will be watching at Eva's door, for "the bridegroom cometh" (Matthew 25:6). It is death that comes in Henrique's place.

Stowe had an international audience in her sights and emphasizes that she is describing a global conflict. Henrique's forename evokes an ominous future, together with a grim past. The name, hardly a common one for the offspring of a planter with Northern origins and Anglo-Saxon pretensions, is Portuguese, reminding the reader of the long history of Atlantic slavery, which effectively began when Henrique the Navigator (1394–1460) brought the first slaves from Africa to be sold in the market in Lagos in Portugal, in 1444. In addition, it strongly suggests parallels with one of the first antislavery novels, set in Cuba. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841) opens as Enrique arrives at a Cuban plantation to court Carlota, the daughter of its proprietor, Don Carlos. Horses loom large in the novel, in which the parallel between slave and horse is emphasized. The slave hero, Sab, a coachman, remarks that only his horse is not ashamed to love him, both of them having been born to servitude. Enrique has poor control of his horse; he has to be saved from a near fatal fall by Sab who (like Uncle Tom, also employed as a coachman in the St. Clare household) has an affinity for horses and exercises control over them. Sab takes one look at Enrique and immediately wonders what Carlota's fate will be once married.

Enrique, ruthlessly materialistic, is contrasted with Don Carlos, an over-indulgent father who permits Carlota to marry despite family misgivings,

because (like Eva) she suffers a dangerous illness. His brother, Agustín, promptly disinherits her. Unlike the Cuban Agustín, Stowe's Augustine is more akin to Don Carlos, described as "one of those peaceful and indolent men who do not know how to do evil, nor to go to great lengths to do good."²⁸ When Don Carlos suffers financial losses, Enrique is about to jilt Carlota until Sab (who has won a lottery) provides the money for her dowry, thus effectively enabling her to sell herself to Enrique. (Sab and Carlota, like Henrique and Eva, are first cousins, although Sab descends from a slave mother.) In essence, Carlota becomes an object of exchange, bought and sold like a slave. As Sab reflects in a letter, a slave may change masters or become free, but a woman is a slave forever.

The conjunction of death and the bridegroom in *Sab* foreshadows that in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Sab drops dead on Carlota's wedding day. Just as Eva gives away locks of her hair, Carlota makes a present of a bracelet of her hair, an apt symbol of her manacled, female status. Like Eva, Carlota appears as an angelic vision, pure and full of love, but she is also depicted as far too innocent. She resolves that when she marries Enrique, "no unhappy soul around will breathe the poisonous air of slavery. We will give all our blacks their freedom."²⁹ But once they are married, no such event occurs, just as Eva's requests to her father to set his slaves free remain unanswered. Carlota becomes a wretchedly unhappy wife, while Enrique gets hold of all her money and treats her as a child. Their union has been a disaster both for her and for their slaves. Stowe also had before her an example of the problems of marriage to a slave owner: her aunt, Mary Foote Hubbard, married a Caribbean planter (in Jamaica) but left him within a year, revolted by his slave children and the cruelties of the system. According to Stowe's family, Hubbard's health was undermined by the mental anguish she suffered at the scenes of cruelty she witnessed. In "Foreshadowings" Eva, clearly in decline, begs her father to free his slaves, saying that the sorrows of the slaves have always sunk into her heart. Eva is named for Augustine's mother who repeatedly tried to influence her husband to be kinder to his slaves, again ineffectually. Not much has changed in three generations of the family – and slavery appears to be as entrenched as in the days of the Portuguese.

Just as novels link to other novels, so slavery offers a web of connections across the globe. In calling *Sab* to mind, Stowe could not have been unaware of the ways social upheaval, despotism, revolution, and slavery were intertwined in the example of Cuba. The successful slave uprising in Haiti had taken it out of the sugar trade, with many French planters fleeing from Haiti to Cuba, which prospered as a result, and imported tens

of thousands more slaves (many, illegally, from the United States). Don Carlos is a Spanish aristocrat; the Spanish had ruthlessly asserted imperial authority in Cuba in 1844 (100 slaves tied to posts and whipped to death). The anticolonial struggle was in the news because of the four expeditions of Narciso López from the United States to Cuba (1848–1851). López's and his men's executions on 16 August 1851 led to an American outcry, followed by the arrival of British and French warships supporting Spanish sovereignty.

U.S. press coverage of López in 1851 was vast, and the *Era* was no exception.³⁰ The serialization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ran from 5 June 1851 to 1 April 1852. The official extension of American slavery to Cuba was a real danger; many Cuban planters would have preferred annexation by the Southern United States to giving up slavery. López hoped that Cuba would join the Union as a slave state, and had considerable Southern support. Just as Henrique leads intertextually to Enrique, and Cuba, the scenes between Henrique and Eva bookend the conversation between Alfred and Augustine that expands from the small domestic focus of the family visit to suggest much broader international contexts. After all, the setting for the conversation is a house in French, Spanish, and Moorish style, surrounded by Arabian jessamines, in Louisiana (formerly French and Spanish); the argument brings in France and Haiti; even Henrique's horse is an Arabian, recently imported. In the space of a few pages the novel opens out, from the domestic space of an intimate family visit to call forth Arabia, Africa, Cuba, France, Haiti, Portugal, and by extension North and South America, and to look back in time from 1850 to the Greeks and Romans, the founding of America, the French Revolution, and the origins of the slave trade. The conflict is firmly placed on a world stage, and in an extended time frame. As Stowe wrote in *Men of Our Times*, the Civil War had been a long time coming: "the preparations for that battle have been the slow work of years."³¹ But it was not a local event: "It was a war for a principle which concerns all mankind. It was the war for the rights of the working class of society as against the usurpation of privileged aristocracies."³²

Notes

- 1 Daniel R. Vollaro, "Lincoln, Stowe and the 'Little Woman/Great War' Story: The Making and Breaking of A Great American Anecdote," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 30, (2009), p. 1.
- 2 John Williams Ward, "Afterword," Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Signet 1966), p. 480, quoted in David S. Reynolds, *Mightier*

Than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle for America (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), p. x.

- 3 Judie Newman, "Writing Against Slavery: Harriet Beecher Stowe," in Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey (eds.), *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 175–196.
- 4 Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword*, p. 54.
- 5 Susan Belasco Smith, "Serialization and the Nature of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," in Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (eds.), *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).
- 6 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 332. Subsequent references follow citations in parentheses.
- 7 Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Introduction," *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, 1878), p. ii.
- 8 Patricia R. Hill, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a Religious Text," in *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture: A Multi-media Archive*. Directed by Stephen Railton. <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc> (accessed 4 December 2008).
- 9 Stowe, "Introduction," *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. xvi.
- 10 For this and details that follow, see Claire Parfait, *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
- 11 Barbara Hochman, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" and the Reading Revolution: *Race, Literacy, Childhood and Fiction, 1851–1911* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), pp. 31–32.
- 12 Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
- 13 Judie Newman, "Staging Black Insurrection: *Dred* on Stage," in Cindy Weinstein (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 113–130.
- 14 John W. Frick, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" on the American Stage and Screen (London: Palgrave, 2012), p. 67.
- 15 Arna Bontemps, *Story of the Negro* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 150.
- 16 John Stauffer, "Foreword," in Maggi M. Morehouse and Zoe Trodd (eds.), *Civil War America: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. xi–xviii.
- 17 Judie Newman, "Introduction," in Judie Newman (ed.), Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Halifax: Ryburn, 1992), pp. 9–25.
- 18 Theodore Hovet, "Christian Revolution: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Response to Slavery and the Civil War," *New England Quarterly* 47, 4 (1974), 535–549.
- 19 Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 300.
- 20 Hovet, "Christian Revolution," 543.
- 21 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853), p. 35.

- 22 Stowe, *Key*, p. 36.
- 23 Stowe, *Key*, p. 229.
- 24 Stowe, *Key*, p. 230.
- 25 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Men of Our Times; or Leading Patriots of the Day* (Hartford: Hartford Publishing Company, 1868), p. 26.
- 26 Stowe, *Men of Our Times*, p. 11.
- 27 Stowe, *Men of Our Times*, p. 12.
- 28 Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y Artega, *Sab and Autobiography*, Nina M. Scott (ed., trans.) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 41. There is no evidence that Stowe read this novel, but the internal parallels strongly suggest that she drew upon it, or an account of it, for the characterization of Eva, Henrique, Tom and Augustine. Handwritten copies of Cuban abolitionist texts circulated in Europe and America to circumvent Spanish censorship.
- 29 Gomez de Avellaneda y Artega, *Sab*, p. 57.
- 30 Tom Chaffin, *Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War Against Cuba* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996). See also Wesley Neil Raabe, "Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: An Electronic Edition of the *National Era* Version" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2006).
- 31 *Men of Our Times*, p. 13.
- 32 *ibid.*

*The American Book Trade and the Civil War**Michael Winship*

On 19 February 1866, Putnam & Malone, purveyors of Books, Stationery, Fancy Goods, Etc. at 52 Dauphin St., Mobile, Alabama, sent a check for \$97.25 drawn on a New York bank to G. & C. Merriam, publishers of Springfield, Massachusetts, to cover the balance of their account. In a letter accompanying the check, Israel Putnam explained that the firm had been “hard pressed, or would have remitted sooner” and, if desired, “will pay you interest.” In a postscript in which he was writing for his former firm of Brawner & Putnam, booksellers of Eufaula, Alabama, Putnam goes on: “Having sold our house & lot in Eufaula Ala, we propose to send on the money in a short time (as soon as the deed can be made out & the money paid) to settle off our old claims.”¹

The bookselling firm of Putnam & Malone was newly established in Mobile, but Putnam must have been known to the Merriams from earlier dealings, and the Massachusetts firm had been willing to extend him credit to place their books in the southern market that had been closed to northern publishers during the war. Already the preceding year, Putnam had advertised under “Books Wanted” in the primary book trade journal, published in Philadelphia, for “Publishers’, Booksellers’, Music, and Stationers’ Trade Lists” generally.² Although newcomers, Putnam and his partner, James R. Malone, quickly gained a reputation as active and energetic businessmen, worthy of credit. Thanks to insurance, their firm survived being burnt out twice in the first half of 1866, and for several years business was prosperous as, over the years, Putnam changed partners several times. By summer 1870, however, Putnam found himself in financial difficulties, with debts, chiefly to Philadelphia firms, estimated to be \$20,000. In September 1870, Putnam left the business and sold his stock for \$7,500 to one of his former partners, R. F. Manly, who was also running a bookstore in Tuscaloosa.³

The history of Israel Putnam’s bookselling enterprise in Mobile is not untypical. It does, however, demonstrate how quickly American

publishers, based chiefly in the North, were able to reach out to a southern market that had been unavailable to them while the Union was at war with the Confederacy; furthermore, it raises interesting questions, seldom addressed, about how the Civil War affected the American book trade. If the results of northern victory in the Civil War altered forever the history of the United States, ending the abominable practice of chattel slavery and guaranteeing citizenship to a substantial proportion of our population, did it have an equally profound effect on how American books were produced, published, distributed, and consumed?

During the half-century preceding the outbreak of war in 1861, infrastructural and organizational changes to the American economy brought about what has been dubbed a market revolution. Between 1840 and 1860, railway mileage expanded tenfold, from 2,818 to 30,625 miles; perhaps even more important were the numerous express companies that, following the establishment of Harnden & Co. in 1841, used transportation networks to manage the shipment of packages from producer to consumer. In 1841, Lewis Tappan, inspired by the Panic of 1837 and its aftermath, founded the Mercantile Agency (later to become R. G. Dun & Co.) to collect and sell to businessmen information about the creditworthiness of their customers. The following year, Volney B. Palmer founded the American Newspaper Subscription and Advertising Agency, the nation's first advertising agency. In 1844, Samuel F. B. Morse first demonstrated the telegraph to the country's leaders, and by the 1850s the firm that would become the Western Union Telegraph Company was already emerging as the nation's largest domestic carrier.

Such innovations changed American business generally but also contributed to the emergence of a national trade book-publishing system in the United States that developed an effective means of distributing books into the national market. Publishers were becoming increasingly concentrated in only a few eastern cities – Boston, Philadelphia, and especially New York – with Cincinnati serving as a western outpost. At the same time, the market was expanding and becoming ever more extensive, as the West and Southwest were settled and new states joined the Union. To function effectively, the book trade depended on these new systems for managing the transportation of books to buyers from the centers of publication, as well as for the efficient exchange of information and transfer of credit.

Key to the national trade book system was the rise of dedicated, independent bookstores in cities and towns across the nation. Most of these stores carried a variety of merchandise in addition to books and stationery,

including games, fancy goods, and such things as razors or musical instruments, but identified themselves chiefly as bookstores. Although chiefly retail outlets, in many small cities and larger towns some bookstores also served as wholesale booksellers, supplying books not only to their retail customers but also to local schools, libraries, and nearby country general stores, which might stock a few books where the population was too small to support a dedicated bookstore. Most publishers also maintained a retail bookstore as part of their business, and many publishers also served as agents or jobbers, collecting a stock of books published by others that they would then supply to retailers, who were thus spared the trouble of establishing an account with multiple publishers.

Those who participated in this national trade book system referred to themselves as the “trade,” and a central feature of the system was regular book trade sales – that is, auctions strictly limited to members of the trade. The first of these auctions was organized by Henry C. Carey, son of the pioneering American publisher Mathew Carey, and held in Philadelphia in August 1824. The Philadelphia sales were supplemented by trade sales in New York from 1825, Boston from 1827, and Cincinnati from 1838. Once established, trade sales were held in each city regularly twice a year, spring and fall, to match the publishing seasons, with the exception of Boston, where a single sale was held each summer. At the sales, book publishers offered both new titles and old stock in quantity, and jobbers and retail booksellers purchased books in lots at prices established by a Dutch auction system. Usually, the first or final days were devoted to the sale of stationery and sets of printing plates, and at some point during the sale, the trade would gather for a celebratory dinner. Thus, trade sales served several important functions beyond the distribution of books: they brought the trade together and fostered communication and cooperation; they allowed publishers to introduce new works and gauge the demand for books on their backlist; they provided a clearinghouse for credit as the auctioneer or other sponsor made arrangements to collect payment from purchasers and transfer it to the publishers whose books had been sold; and they produced printed trade-sale catalogs that served as a record of what books were in print and available.⁴

By 1860 the book trade sales had become important indeed. The fall series of sales began with the Boston sale that commenced on 1 August and lasted for five days. A month later came the New York sale, which began on 4 September, followed by the Philadelphia sale, which began on 17 September, and the Cincinnati sale, which began on 24 September.⁵ The catalog for the New York sale, “the largest Trade Sale Catalogue ever

issued, 528 pages,” included invoices from the principal publishing houses of Boston, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and New York, as well as from a few firms in smaller towns located almost entirely in New England (Andover, Hallowell, Hartford, Keene, New Bedford, New Haven, and Springfield), upstate New York (Albany, Auburn, and Cazenovia) and the Midwest (Columbus, Ohio, and Chicago).⁶ The sale of books alone lasted nine full days, and the “most remote parts of the South and West” were represented among the purchasers, “buyers being present from Pensacola, Fla.; Dallas and Houston, Texas; Dubuque, Iowa; Milwaukee and Janesville, Wis.; Des Moines, Iowa; St. Louis, New Orleans, Chicago, &c.”⁷ A summary account of the sale reports that it had been

... unusually spirited and successful. The prices of the leading copyright works and of the best library editions were satisfactory, and the demand seemed to indicate a healthy and prosperous state of the trade in nearly every part of the country. Southern dealers were perhaps more cautious in their purchases than usual, but the great West is evidently waking up from the depression of the last three years, and was well represented among the buyers at this sale.⁸

The three trade sales outside New York were not as large but were also generally deemed a success. Despite the looming crisis, brought to a head by the Republican victory in the fall’s presidential election, the American book trade seemed to be functioning well. In January 1861, when the first notes from the largest buyers at the New York sale came due, trade sale auctioneer George A. Leavitt & Co. reported that these notes, payable in New York, totaled \$90,000 and were from 105 booksellers in all parts of the United States, including “Chicago, Ill., Pensacola, Fla., Ypsilanti, Mich., Indianapolis, Ind., Battle Creek, Mich., Tallahassee Fla., Pittsburg, Pa., Ann Arbor, Mich., Milwaukee, Wis., Fort Madison, Iowa, Jackson, Mich., Atlanta, Geo., Toronto, C.W., Detroit, Mich., Mobile, Ala., and other distant points.” However, every note was promptly paid, “with the exception of one from Florida and one from Ala., extended for a short period.”⁹

If most literary works that appeared in book form were published by the trade, listed in the trade sale catalogs, and offered for sale in bookstores, a great deal of material was produced and consumed outside the trade. Much “amateur” literature, especially poetry, circulated in manuscript or was copied into albums. Other works, including sermons and collections of poetry, were printed locally as pamphlets or books at the expense of the author. Some works were prepared for publication by subscription,

a system that employed canvassers to gather orders for a work, often pre-publication, directly from purchasers. But by far the most common place for the publication of literary works was in the periodical press, both magazines and newspapers. During the antebellum years, a number of these periodicals were being circulated to a national audience, either through the mails or by means of the network of newsagents and periodical depots that had grown up during the 1840s and 1850s. But a far greater number of magazines and newspapers were printed and consumed locally or regionally, although their content might have a broader circulation because of postal laws that allowed for the free passage of single issues of newspapers and the practice that encouraged editors to copy and reprint freely any item that they received on "exchange."

It has often been claimed that the antebellum South was book poor, and indeed only a single southern firm – the "late" W. R. Babcock of Charleston – is listed among the contributors to the September 1860 New York trade sale. It was certainly true that literacy rates were not as high there as in the Northeast and West and that many slave states had laws forbidding the teaching of African Americans to read, but the truth is more complicated than many historians allow.¹⁰ Henry C. Carey, in his reminiscences dated 23 May 1863, recalled that "Even so recently as forty years since, the trade looked chiefly to the South for a market for their books." He goes on to list a number of important northern firms that early in the century had established branches in southern cities and towns, before concluding:

The tendency was then to look almost altogether South, whereas it is now almost altogether West. Chicago, a city that scarcely existed twenty years since, now absorbs, I imagine, more books than were ever purchased, in the years of their highest prosperity, by all the Cotton States put together.¹¹

But even as it had become overshadowed by the West, the market for books in the South remained significant through the 1850s. In 1856, the Boston publisher Ticknor and Fields maintained credit accounts with twenty-six bookselling firms in nine southern states and the District of Columbia. The credit extended, at just under \$6,000, was not large; however, this figure also greatly understates the value of the southern market to the firm, for its publications would certainly have found their way into the shops of a far greater number of booksellers by means of agents and jobbing firms, especially those in Philadelphia, which made a specialty of supplying books to the South.¹² A note in the New York *Evening Post* about the success of the *New American Cyclopædia* – published in sixteen

Table 2.1. *Bookstores in the southern states before the civil war*

	1859	
	No. of listings	Cities and towns
Virginia	83	34
North Carolina	47	19
South Carolina	23	10
Georgia	62	27
Florida	12	3
Alabama	62	23
Louisiana	38	8
Texas	25	13
Mississippi	47	18
Arkansas	14	5
Tennessee	57	19
Total	470	179

Source: Orville A. Roorbach, *List of Booksellers in the United States and the Canadas, Collected since May Last, by Direct Communication with Every City and Town on the List* (New York: Orville A. Roorbach, March, 1859).

volumes at prices ranging from \$3 to \$4.50 per volume by D. Appleton & Co. beginning in 1858 and available solely by subscription – reports that the work had attracted no fewer than 17,000 subscribers, 5,000 of whom lived in the slave states, with the greatest number of these from Louisiana.¹³ The number of bookstores in the South in 1859 was also surprisingly large, as indicated in Table 2.1.¹⁴

Nevertheless, southern firms were not major contributors to the manufacture or publication of books distributed through the national book trade system during the 1850s. As in the North, a certain amount of material – newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and the occasional book – was produced in the South for local or regional circulation and consumption, but here again manufacturing facilities fell far behind those available in the North. According to the census of 1860, there were a total of 1,666 “book, job, and newspaper establishments” in the thirty-six states and territories, but only 151 were located in the eleven southern states – just one more than in the single state of Massachusetts and far fewer than the number in New York, with 349, or Pennsylvania, with 267. The value of the printing done by these southern firms came to just \$1.2 million, an even smaller proportion of the national total of \$31.1 million. The statistics for binderies of printed and blank books are also telling: the census records only 17 establishments, out of a total of 269 for the nation as a whole, in

just five southern states. Similarly, the southern states were home to only 24 paper mills, out of 555 for the nation as a whole, and these manufactured less than 5 percent of the total printing paper produced nationally. The census returns indicate no typefounding, stereotyping, or electrotyping firms in the South.¹⁵

These numbers surely underestimate the actual situation, as this report on Nashville's book trade in 1858 suggests:

There had been \$75,000 worth of paper manufactured at Whiteman's mill on White's Creek . . . , and Nashville's four large bookbinderies had done \$53,000 worth of work. . . . Job work and advertising done by Nashville printing offices totaled \$78,471. Books and stationery not manufactured in Nashville but sold over the counters of her thriving bookstores totalled \$210,000. Furthermore, Nashville presses had manufactured fully 532,693 books in 1858 alone with a wholesale market value of \$224,038.¹⁶

These extraordinary figures must, in large part, be a result of religious publishing, for the Methodist Episcopal Church South had decided to locate its publishing house in Nashville in 1854, followed shortly thereafter by the South-Western Baptist Publishing House.¹⁷

In addition to Charleston's W. R. Babcock, only a very few additional southern firms contributed to the national book market during the 1850s. These included A. Morris and J. W. Randolph of Richmond, Virginia, and S. H. Goetzel of Mobile, Alabama. The only southern periodicals that could make a real claim for a national audience were the *Southern Literary Messenger* of Richmond and the commercial *De Bow's Review* of New Orleans. Most of what was produced in the South was of only local interest and very little of a literary nature: of the 609 imprints recorded as produced in Richmond from 1853 through 1860, well over half consisted of religious works (149 or 24.5%), minutes (127 or 20.9%), and speeches (83 or 13.6%), whereas sixteen volumes of poetry, fifteen narrations, and a single play combined to make up just 5.3 percent.¹⁸ Southern literary authors who aspired to a national reputation were, by and large, dependent on northern publishers and magazine editors. Southern readers were chiefly dependent on imports, whether from the North or England, for reading matter.¹⁹

After the outbreak of hostilities and the imposition of an embargo in April 1861, southern printers and publishers found themselves increasingly cut off from their chief source of supplies and faced shortages of such fundamental materials as paper, type, and ink.²⁰ Nevertheless, the Confederacy managed to produce an impressive number of publications during the war. The business of establishing and running a government and managing the war effort called for a great deal of print, and of the 9,497 items listed in the most complete record of Confederate imprints,

just under half (4,714) is grouped under the heading Official Publications. The greater number of these (2,600) were imprints produced at the behest of the federal government, with the remainder issued by the governments of the thirteen Confederate states and the Cherokee and Choctaw nations. A vast proportion of these official publications consist of broadsides, leaflets, and short pamphlets that printed bills, resolutions, proclamations, committee reports and such, but a few more substantial volumes were also produced.²¹

The 4,783 “unofficial” Confederate imprints are much more varied in size and content. The greatest number by far (1,517 or 31.7%) is classed under “religion (including fraternal organizations),” items ranging from the psalms and new testaments issued by the Confederate States Bible Society to sermons, tracts, and the reports of both religious and fraternal organizations. Another 969 items (20.3%) are grouped under “politics, economics, and social issues (including almanacs, business, agriculture, slavery, railroads, etc.),” and the war itself was the occasion for the 413 (8.6%) grouped under “military (including military texts & manuals, miscellanies, biography, and history).” The items under “education (including educational institutions and text books)” number 324 (6.8%), “science and medicine” contains 51 (1.1%), and “maps and prints” has 60 items (1.3%). The remainder can be broadly classed as literary: “belles-lettres (including fiction, poetry, broadside verse, humor, juveniles, and drama)” with 407 items (8.5%), “music and entertainment (including songsters, musical instruction, play-bills, and entertainments)” with 171 (3.6%), and “sheet music” with 871 (18.2%).²²

Most of the belletristic material was ephemeral, in both content and form, with poems and short fiction written by amateurs and published as broadsides or pamphlets making up the bulk. But some works by Confederate citizens that were published during the war, especially its latter years, are more memorable. In Richmond, West & Johnston published G. W. Bagby’s humorous *Letters of Mozis Addums to Billy Ivins* and reprinted N. Beverly Tucker’s *The Partisan Leader* in 1862, both James Dabney McCabe’s domestic drama *Guerrillas* and William Russell Smith’s dramatic poem *The Royal Ape* the following year, then two editions of Augusta Jane Evans’s *Macaria* in 1864. McCabe’s *The Aid-de-Camp* and a reprint of J. B. Jones’s *Wild Western Scenes* both appeared in 1863, published in Richmond by W. A. J. Smith and M. A. Malsby, respectively. Elsewhere, Peck & Wells issued William Henry Peck’s *The Conspirators of New Orleans* in Greenville, Georgia, in 1863, and Stockton & Co. of Augusta published Richard Malcolm Johnston’s *Georgia Sketches* in 1864.²³

The Confederate Constitution, adopted 11 March 1861, gave Congress the right to secure “for limited times to authors . . . the exclusive right to their respective writings,” and on 21 May 1861 Congress passed an “act to secure copy rights to authors and composers” based largely on existing U.S. law. The Confederate act differed, however, by extending, on certain conditions, copyright protection to the works of “citizens or subjects of any foreign State or power,” a provision aimed at gaining sympathy and recognition for the new nation from foreign governments, especially that of Great Britain.²⁴ It is not clear that any foreign author benefited from this provision, but Confederate publishers did produce editions of many popular European authors to substitute for those that otherwise would have been purchased from northern publishers. S. H. Goetzel of Mobile led the way with an edition in parts of Edward Bulwer Lytton’s *A Strange Story* in late 1862, a success that led Goetzel to announce that he had placed \$1,000 to the author’s credit. He followed it with reprints of recent novels by M. E. Braddon, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Luise Mühlbach. West & Johnston of Richmond was also active: from 1863 to 1865 the firm issued editions of recent novels by Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Dinah Mulock Craik, Octave Feuillet, Victor Hugo, and Mrs. Henry Wood. In Columbia, South Carolina, Evans & Cogswell issued W. M. Thackeray’s *The Adventures of Philip*.²⁵

A great deal of literary material also appeared in southern magazines and newspapers during the Confederacy. Indeed, with the war’s onset, Confederate nationalism encouraged the founding of several new magazines: in Richmond, two weeklies, the *Southern Illustrated News* and the *Magnolia: A Southern Home Journal*, and in Memphis, the *Southern Monthly*. But the difficulties that faced book publishers – the limited supply of printing paper and other materials necessary for production, the lack of skilled labor, and the inflation and disruption to business brought about by the war itself – were even greater for periodicals. The *Southern Monthly* survived only nine months, and even those magazines that were well established before the war did not last. By March 1863, the subscription price to the *Southern Literary Messenger* had increased from \$3 to \$5, and the lack of paper and frequent double issues meant that it had effectively become a bimonthly periodical. A year later subscriptions cost \$15, and the June 1864 issue was the magazine’s last. Early in the war, *De Bow’s Review* fled New Orleans for Columbia, South Carolina, where publication was finally suspended in August 1862. Only a single issue appeared in July 1864 before publication was finally revived in January 1866, after peace had returned. Given this record, it is remarkable that both the new

Richmond weeklies survived until the final months of the war; although by the end of 1863 subscriptions had reached \$20.²⁶

Initially the Civil War also brought contraction to the northern book trade. Even before the outbreak of hostilities, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, in a piece entitled "The Effect of the Crisis on Literature," that "The number of volumes published now is not more than one-tenth of the usual proportion."²⁷ By June, stagnation in the trade had become so bad that the *American Publishers' Circular*, the book trade's major trade journal, announced that henceforth it would publish issues monthly rather than weekly because "The entire absorption of public interest by current events has caused a nearly complete cessation in the demand for new books, and publishers have in consequence discontinued their usual issues."²⁸ In Boston, the literary publishers Ticknor and Fields, who had issued 50,560 volumes of poetry in 1860, reduced that number to 19,105 in 1861. Overall, the firm cut back the number of printings of its publications in 1861 to 110 with a total retail value of just \$121,780, reduced from 225 and \$231,388 in 1860.²⁹

The cost of the war effort was met in the North by a series of new taxes. On 5 August 1861, duties were increased on most imported articles, and an excise tax on manufactures was approved on 1 July 1862. Both were amended several times during the war to adjust rates, but the overall effect was to increase the cost of book production. The tariff on imported paper, for instance, first set at 30 percent, was then increased to 35 percent in July 1862, before being reduced to 20 percent on 3 March 1863; the duties on chemicals used in the manufacture of paper – alum, bleaching powders, and soda ash – also increased, in the last case, by a factor of 12.5. Meanwhile, an excise tax was set at 3 percent on all paper produced domestically, with a further 3 percent tax on the incomes of the manufacturers. Combined with the disruption to the cotton trade brought about by the war, the price of paper rapidly increased and many American paper mills were forced to close.³⁰ Binding and other costs of book production were affected similarly. On 30 June 1864 a new 5% ad valorem tax on books was put in place.³¹

The result was inevitable, and in November 1862 the *American Publishers' Circular* announced that "In consequence of the increased cost of paper, binding, boards, leather, muslin, many of the publishers will advance their prices ten per cent."³² Book prices had remained remarkably stable throughout the antebellum years, but once increased, they continued to inflate as the war progressed. For example, the two-volume blue-and-gold edition of Longfellow's *Poems* published by Ticknor and Fields was printed twice in 1860 at a cost of 63¢ and sold at retail at \$1.75,

but by January 1863 the cost had risen to 69¢ and the price to \$2.00. By February 1864, the cost had risen further to 82¢ with no increase in price, but by May at a cost of 97.5¢ the book was retailed at \$3.00.³³ In a piece discussing the New York fall trade sale of 1864, the *Evening Post* noted "An advance of nearly thirty per cent. on the average . . . in the price of many and the better classes of books since the spring sale" on account of the fall in gold and the cost of "Licenses, taxes, and the scarcity of paper, together with the increased rates of labor."³⁴

As retail prices rose, the book trade began to rebound. In 1862, Ticknor and Fields ordered 224 printings of both new and old works, only one fewer than in 1860, although press runs were smaller and the total retail value came only to \$182,000. A comment on the spring 1863 trade sales in New York and Philadelphia explained that "the result of these sales shows a decidedly healthy state of the market: if the price of paper was not so high, we might soon expect to see a great improvement in business."³⁵ By year's end, the *American Literary Gazette* could proclaim that "We think we can safely assert that such a healthy and successful condition of the book trade has never heretofore been known in the United States."³⁶ On Christmas 1863 Ticknor and Fields published its quarto edition of George Ticknor's *Life of William Hickling Prescott*, one of the most elegant and well-printed volumes produced in the nineteenth-century United States, at the extravagant retail price of \$7.50. During these years, further examples of distinguished American typography were produced, including an illustrated edition of Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* issued by Ticknor and Fields in December 1864, a seven-volume *Complete Works* of Longfellow limited to 100 copies from the same firm the following year, and a three-volume edition of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* published by Harper & Brothers in 1865.

The war also brought new markets for publishers to exploit. During the early years, many military manuals and tactical treatises were rushed into a print, a field that D. Van Nostrand in New York and, to a lesser extent, J. B. Lippincott & Co. of Philadelphia came to dominate. The armies themselves were a newly created audience, and several series of light reading, mostly in pamphlet form, were aimed at entertaining the troops. The most famous of these are the various series of dime novels published by Beadle & Adams, whose reprint of Ann S. Stephens's *Malaeska* had appeared in June 1860 as the first of what would become a popular marketing format for decades to come. Also, the war itself became the subject of numerous works – military biographies, field histories, and records of current events – that appealed to readers self-consciously interested in the history that was taking place around them. Perhaps the most ambitious

Table 2.2. *Bookstores in the southern states after the civil war*

	1867		1870	
	No. of listings	Cities and towns	No. of listings	Cities and towns
Virginia	47	17	70	17
North Carolina	10	7	22	15
South Carolina	9	1	31	10
Georgia	21	6	40	18
Florida	0	0	8	5
Alabama	15	4	37	16
Louisiana	43	5	116	19
Texas	9	2	29	12
Mississippi	11	7	35	20
Arkansas	4	3	7	5
Tennessee	21	8	72	21
Total	190	60	467	158

Source: John H. Dingman, *A Complete List of Booksellers, Stationers, and News Dealers in the United States and The Canadas, Revised and Corrected to the Date of Publication* (New York: John H. Dingman, 1867) and John H. Dingman, *Directory of Booksellers, Stationers, Newsdealers, and Music Dealers ... in the United States and Canada, Complete to November 1st, 1870* (New York: John H. Dingman, 1870).

of these was *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events*. Edited by Frank Moore and published by G. P. Putnam, *The Record* was issued serially beginning in May 1861 and not completed until 1868. The articles and wood-engraved images that reported on the course of the war in such popular magazines as *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* reached a far wider audience.

As the 1866 letter from Putnam & Malone suggests, when the war ended the southern market for books quickly opened up again to northern publishers, as bookstores throughout the South, whether newly formed or long established, built up their stock (see Table 2.2). Money was, of course, a problem, as many southern booksellers must have had little cash other than valueless Confederate bills, but northern publishers were often willing to extend credit to make sure that their books got into the hands of southern purchasers. In cases where southern bookstores had been in business before the war, many northern publishers had simply kept their accounts open during the war years. In many cases, the debt now had to be forgiven and written off, at least in part, although often the amount due was eventually paid in full.

The Civil War did bring changes to the book trade. The antebellum national book distribution system had been disrupted. Although the trade sales had continued during the war years – indeed, their success was seen as a gauge of the health of the book trade – they were becoming less important. The Boston trade sale scheduled for August 1865 was canceled, and no more were held. The final trade sale in Philadelphia took place the following March, but the Philadelphia booksellers had already met in January 1864 to discuss perceived problems with the sales. The Cincinnati trade sales continued for another decade – the last was held in October 1878. Only in New York did trade sales continue through the end of the century, although their importance was much diminished as they came to be seen chiefly as a place to dump overstock, remainders, and books that no longer had any real market.³⁷

In early 1864, the American News Company was formed with the merger of two rival news dealers, Sinclair Tousey and Dexter, Hamilton & Co. Although the partners had earlier specialized in the wholesale distribution of newspapers and periodicals, the new firm expanded to become an important wholesale jobber of books as well, joining established firms such as D. Appleton & Co. of New York and J. B. Lippincott & Co. of Philadelphia that had long combined wholesaling with their publishing activities. In the 1870s, with the decline of the trade sales, several other large firms were formed that specialized in book jobbing rather than or as much as publishing: Jansen, McClurg & Co. in Chicago and Baker, Pratt & Co. and Charles T. Dillingham in New York. Wholesaling through jobbers would become the principal means of book distribution in the United States until the present century.

With the end of the war, excise taxes were eventually lowered or eliminated, but with war inflation retail prices remained high, even after production costs began to drop. The increase in margin allowed publishers to offer deep discounts – sometimes very deep – to wholesalers and favored customers. This situation was exacerbated by the trade sales in which many books were bought in at prices far below retail. Underselling became rampant, especially during periods of economic recession, and various attempts at regularizing discounts across the trade or enforcing retail price maintenance proved ineffective. These are problems that have continued to plague the American book trade up to the present moment, but in the years following the Civil War senior members of the trade must have looked back on the relative stability of antebellum years with no small amount of nostalgia.

Notes

- 1 Putnam & Malone to G. & C. Merriam, 19 Feb. 1866 (in possession of the author).
- 2 *American Literary Gazette* 5 (15 Sept. 1865), 218; similar ads appeared subsequently in 6 (1 Dec. 1865), 91 and (15 Jan. 1866), 184. Hereafter cited as *ALG*.
- 3 See Alabama, v. 18, 363, 409, 455 1/2, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.
- 4 Michael Winship, "Getting the Books Out: Trade Sales, Parcel Sales, and Book Fairs in the Nineteenth-Century United States" in *Getting the Books Out: Papers of the Chicago Conference on the Book in 19th-Century America*, Michael Hackenberg (ed.) (Washington DC: Center for the Book, 1987), pp. 4–25.
- 5 For the Boston sale, see *American Publishers' Circular* 6 (1860), 144, 200, 362, 380, 390, 402–403, 415; for New York, see 335, 394, 426, 450, 466–467, 482–483, 498; for Philadelphia, see 398, 450, 498; for Cincinnati, see 361, 450. Hereafter cited as *APC*.
- 6 *APC* 6 (4 and 18 Aug. 1860), 394, 421. No copy of the catalog can be located today.
- 7 *APC* 6 (15 Sept. 1860), 466.
- 8 Report from *The World* reprinted in *APC* 6 (22 Sept. 1860), 482–483.
- 9 *APC* 7 (12 Jan. 1861), 13.
- 10 Beth Barton Schweiger, "The Literate South: Reading before Emancipation," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3 (Sept. 2013), 331–359.
- 11 Henry C. Carey, "Reminiscences of a Publisher," *ALG* 1 (1 June 1863), 130–131.
- 12 Warren S. Tryon, "The Publications of Ticknor and Fields in the South, 1840–1865," *Journal of Southern History* 14 (1948), 305–330, and Michael Winship, *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Business of Ticknor and Fields* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 198–199. Note: These figures include Maryland as a southern state.
- 13 *ALG* 1 (15 Jan. 1863), 1–2.
- 14 See also "List of Booksellers in the Southern States," *APC* 6 (24 March 1860), 142–144.
- 15 *Manufactures of the United States in 1860* (Washington DC: GPO, 1865), pp. cxxi–cxxix, cxxxii–cxlv.
- 16 David Kaser, *A Directory of the Book and Printing Industries in Ante-Bellum Nashville* (New York: New York Public Library, 1966), p. 16, citing John P. Campbell, *Nashville Business Directory ... Vol IV, 1859* (Nashville: E. G. Eastman, 1859), pp. 6–7, as source.
- 17 Kaser, *Directory*, pp. 14–15.
- 18 Vivian A. Starke, "A Checklist of Richmond, Virginia, Imprints from 1853 through 1860, with a Historical Introduction," MLS thesis, Catholic University of America (1957), p. 127.

- 19 A substantial bibliographical literature documents the printed production of the South from 1850 to 1870; for citations to works not included in these notes, see G. Thomas Tanselle, *Guide to the Study of United States Imprints* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971). Important works that have appeared since Tanselle's publication include Florence M. Jumonville, *Bibliography of New Orleans Imprints, 1764–1864* (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection, 1989) and Cathleen A. Baker, "The Press that Cotton Built: Printing in Mobile, Alabama, 1850–1865," PhD diss., University of Alabama, 2004.
- 20 Ellen Gay Detlefsen, "Printing in the Confederacy, 1861–1865: A Southern Industry in Wartime," DLS diss., Columbia University, 1975.
- 21 T. Michael Parrish and Robert M. Willingham, Jr., *Confederate Imprints: A Bibliography of Southern Publications from Secession to Surrender, Expanding and Revising the Earlier Works of Marjorie Crandall & Richard Harwell* (Austin: Jenkins Publishing Co., 1987). See also Kathleen Sophia Hambrough Cheape, *Confederate Book Publishing with Emphasis on Richmond, Virginia*, MLS thesis, University of North Carolina, 1960.
- 22 Parrish and Willingham, *Confederate Imprints*.
- 23 Ibid. Although less complete, its arrangement makes "Belles-Lettres" in Marjorie Lyle Crandall, *Confederate Imprints: A Check List Based Principally on the Collection of the Boston Athenaeum*, 2 vols. (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1955), pp. 527–558, useful; see also Richard Barksdale Harwell, *Confederate Belles-Lettres: A Bibliography and a Finding List of the Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Songsters, and Miscellaneous Literature Published in the Confederate States of America* (Hattiesburg: Book Farm, 1941), and Lawrence F. London, "Confederate Literature and Its Publishers" in *Studies in Southern History in Memory of Albert Ray Newsome, 1894–1951*, J. Carlyle Sitterson (ed.) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), pp. 82–96.
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- 33 Ticknor and Fields, *Cost Book*, rough (11), 8, 69, (13), 55, (14), 83, 129, MS Am 2030.2, items 10, 12, and 13, Houghton Mifflin Records, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.
- 34 Reprinted in *ALG* 3 (1 Oct. 1864), 349–350.
- 35 *ALG* 1 (1 May 1863), 13.
- 36 *ALG* 2 (1 Dec. 1863), 79.
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CHAPTER 3

The Transatlantic History of Civil War Literature

Christopher Hanlon

Beyond the national polity it fractured, beyond the romance of continental manifest destiny it unsettled, the U.S. Civil War perturbed North Atlantic spheres of belonging that had oriented a larger midcentury, romantically inflected U.S. literary culture. Consider in that way Mary Boykin Chesnut's regret, recorded in a diary entry she wrote seven months into the war, over having subscribed to several British periodicals the prior January, when printed materials could more easily cross the Atlantic into the southern section of the then United States. Beyond her irritation at having paid for publications now subject to the federal blockade, Chesnut rues still more the winnowing of her once cosmopolitan reading list. "Everything stopped with Fort Sumter," she opines. "How I miss that way of looking out into the world! The war has cost me that. How much more?"¹

The war had cost Chesnut her worldly vantage not simply by dint of federal prohibitions on imports including publications such as *Blackwood's* or *Cornhill Magazine*, to name two periodicals Chesnut mentions. After predictions that Britain would ally itself to the Confederacy proved too sanguine, it would exact from her a sense of transatlantic kinship even while distorting her sense of geopolitical reality. Officially neutral with regard to the U.S. conflict (even if merely, in the bywords of the Palmerston government, "at present"), "England is patting both sides on the back," she writes. "She loves to see a Kilkenny cat fight. After all, she is not dying for the want of our cotton. She is prospering and pampering her India cotton and will magnanimously accept any apology for the Mason and Slidell affair that smart Yankee Seward will tender her" (*MC* 241). In fact, the operatives at hundreds of Lancashire and Yorkshire mills were starving, not prospering, as a result of cotton shortages secession had caused. And in fact, although armed conflict with the northern states was averted (according to Tennyson in his 1862 Dedication for *Idylls of the King*, only through a well-placed word of Albert's, and thence a recalled

letter of Victoria's), British heads of state and of government can hardly be said to have leapt at the diplomatic overtures of the Lincoln administration. In fact after Federal officers removed Confederate emissaries James Mason and John Slidell from the R.M.S. *Trent* in November, just as Chesnut was deploring the interruption of her British subscriptions, Foreign Minister Lord Russell ordered a massive buildup of British troops along Maine's northern border, threatening the Lincoln administration with a two-front war.

Chesnut's sense of Britain's cozy rapport with the northern states was exaggerated, in other words. Nevertheless, she shared with many others similarly connected to the upper reaches of the Confederate government a sense that Parliament was on the verge of an historic betrayal of its distant family in the American South. In July 1862, she cites rumors that "Seward has gone to England," assuming that "his wily tongue will turn all hearts against us" (MC 416). Although earlier entries recapitulate popular forecasts that Britain would enjoin the conflict against the Union,² she also denounces John Russell as a defamer of the Confederacy (MC 161). And in September 1863, tempered now by the annihilation of so many Confederate lives, she flings back at the English her quotation of Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (1852):

You gentlemen of England who live at home at ease, and compliment yourselves in the songs of triumph unto which our Chieftains are bepraised! You pretty maidens of England that come trembling down the stairs when fife and drum call you – And huzza for the British Grenadier – Do you take account that these items go to make up the amount of the triumph you admire, and form part of the duties of the heroes you fondle! (MC 446)

Indeed the lines from Thackeray reference a traditional English song that criticizes gentry sitting well behind the front lines of war (unlike James Chesnut, for example, who commanded the siege of Fort Sumter and participated in the first Bull Run), although in *Henry Esmond* the point is to underline the human costs of military conflict more usually obscured in triumphalist accounts. And so for Chesnut, the object of quoting Thackeray is to point out that "our Lee, like Wellington, forbids the ruthless rapine described" (MC 446). But if in her account British policymakers had undermined the Confederacy in failing to recognize the seceding states as a nation, and if that failure also dissolved, for many Confederates, an imagined special relationship with England, for their part northern commentators were similarly irritated with English attitudes toward the American crisis. John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "To Englishmen,"

published in the 30 January 1862 issue of the New York *Independent* before its republication in *The Liberator* and *Littell's*, addresses itself to antislavery English critics of the Lincoln administration. Having “flung [their] taunt across the wave” in holding Republican leaders accountable for insufficiently abolitionist policies, these fickle detractors now “Send greetings to” the Confederacy “o’er the surge, / And comfort and protect it,” or so Whittier maintains in denouncing a formerly revered England:

But yesterday you scarce could shake,
In slave-abhorring rigor,
Our Northern palms for conscience’ sake;
To-day you clasp the hands that ache
With “walloping the nigger!”

O Englishmen! – in hope and creed,
In blood and tongue our brothers!
We too are heirs of Runnymede;
And Shakespeare’s fame and Cromwell’s deed
Are alone not our mother’s.

[...] We bowed the heart, if not the knee,
To England’s Queen, God bless her!
We praised you when your slaves went free:
We seek to unchain ours. Will ye
Join hands with the oppressor?³

For Whittier, the ongoing neutrality of the British represented the failure of English leaders, reformers, and public intellectuals to consecrate an alliance otherwise steeped in kinship. “Through centuries of story,” he suggests, “Our Saxon blood has flowed, and still / We share with you its good and ill [...]” Even in simply pointing out the obvious – that Lincoln’s reassurances to the South on his election, for instance, raised questions over his commitment to reform – English abolitionists effectively “Join hands with the oppressor” at this moment to choose sides. And so a dispute among reformers becomes in Whittier’s poem a kind of familial splintering, wherein professedly liberty-loving descendants of the same “Saxon” forebears now divide over merely topical disputes. Like Chesnut (convinced that had it “rest[ed] but true” to itself, England would have recognized and supported the Confederacy [132]), Whittier imagines the cisatlantic turmoil of the moment as if triangulated with a perversely unhelpful England. Indeed, at such moments both writers seem as dismayed with an imagined transatlantic fissure as with the more pressingly domestic division at hand.

As two writers working on opposite sides of the Mason-Dixon during the war, Chesnut and Whittier channel a much broader tendency of bellum partisans to codify the conflict in terms of other notions about England. That tendency has a longer context, delineated by Americanist literary historians over the course of the past two decades. Indeed, the historiography of nineteenth-century literary culture has shifted because of scholars whose work makes clear the transatlantic character of Anglo-American literary production, consumption, and reception until at least 1891, when the United States ratified its first copyright treaty – that is, virtually the entire nineteenth century.⁴ American readers certainly read English books and periodicals with great frequency, and through these consumed English news, opinion, and cultural predilection that would in turn shape U.S. literary tastes throughout the century. And so the Civil War was perhaps the most significant disruption of the transnational flow that otherwise conditioned the period, both in terms of the blockade that altered southern readers' access to books and periodicals and in terms of the fantasies of transatlantic esteem whose reconfiguration the crisis provoked.

But in a still more specifically antebellum way, that wider readerly and cultural familiarity with England also spoke to the trying effects of English example on American notions of U.S. democratic distinction. Decades of emancipatory transformation within the British Empire constituted a counterhistory that freighted U.S. apprehensions of England, the imperial power from which the United States had detached, defining itself in stridently invidious contrast. Indeed much literature written in the context of U.S. sectional struggle – or later, during the war itself – negotiated between an impulse to associate section with varying constructs of English identity (as when Emerson suggests in 1844 that “[t]he national aim and employment [of the English] streams into our ways of thinking, our laws, our habits and our manners,” or as he describes English religiosity in 1843 as “a rich stream of antique faith descended into New England”) and a parallel tendency to discredit English perspective (as when he complains, at the height of the war in 1863, that “In the sight of a commodity, [England’s] religion, her moral principles are forgotten”⁶).

The second point speaks to Chesnut’s and Whittier’s varying expressions of dismay with the English, for although their cisatlantic ideologies are diametrical in every other way that matters in the 1860s, they are aligned under the sense that the war had undermined their own region’s special connection to English sensibilities and traditions. But that response to British foreign policies seemingly calculated to encourage

neither side was itself energized by a prior habit of imagining sectional politics as if rooted in still broader transatlantic backgrounds. To that point, consider a sonnet by William Gilmore Simms, first published anonymously in an 1861 edition of the *Charleston Mercury* before appearing in the February/March issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and included eventually in Simms's 1867 anthology *War Poetry of the South*. Like many political poems written from within the Confederacy, "Morals of Party" asks its reader to consider Confederate politics as an expression of Confederate racial constitution. In fact Simms's ventures toward deeper ontologies still, urging his reader to "consider well what race it is, / And what the germ that first hath made it free," before supposing, further, "That germ must constitute the living tie / That binds its generations to the end [...]" Politics, Simms argues, cannot help but to entwine that binding stock, that living tie. Because "Each race hath its own nature – fixed, defined, / By Heaven," all politics are transacted at congenital registers, "grow[ing] to consummation, as the tree / Matured, that ever grew in culture free."⁷

Simms's couching of national division as a form of fidelity to lineage instances a southern racialism that enjoyed increasing currency over the decades of sectional tension prior to the war, whereupon it would mature to a full-flown mythology rooting southern identity in an English past. Indeed, and in keeping with that tendency to codify sectional identities as if possessed of an ethnic dimension, it is during the antebellum period that the term "southron" – which conflates regional residency with at least the implication of biological distinction – emerges in U.S. usage as a useful identifier for white citizens living below the Mason-Dixon. Prior to the 1820s, in fact, the word referred to English inhabitants of the British Isles. Such populations were described as "sutheroun," "suthron," or "sothron" in the works of Scottish writers; beginning with a fifteenth-century account of the life of William Wallace, the word and its variants achieved later usage among writers such as William Hamilton and Robert Burns. But even for those eighteenth-century Scottish authors, southrons were defined primarily by a geographical locatedness from which extended a sequence of political allegiances. By the time of Simms's 1861 poem about the racial coordinates of party politics, the word indicated a form of nativity verging unto biological belonging. Southern authors of prose and poetry would appropriate the term as part of a tendency to think of themselves as genetically distinct from white northerners, and they traced those distinctions to England, which in many U.S. accounts had been biologically divided since the Norman Conquest.⁸

In southern poetry written during the 1850s and then during the war, such expressions of southern identity simultaneously retreat into region and gesture toward larger, transnational dimensions of kinship outfitted to displace the national community from which Confederates would withdraw in 1861. Similarly, northerners would configure their own ideas of sectional fidelity in terms of other expressions of transatlantic identification, structuring a highly idiosyncratic period in U.S. literary production. In this way, much U.S. literature written during the war itself, or explicitly responsive to intensifying sectional tensions during the decade prior to the secession,⁹ complicates again the transnational currents charted by Americanist literary historians. For if in one sense, those scholars have retrieved a culture of fluid transnational exchange otherwise effaced in more nationally bound accounts of U.S. literary production and readership, bellum artists, writers, and other public intellectuals channeled those currents of Atlantic culture in ways that actually hardened sectional identity in the United States, often shifting the forms of cosmopolitanism whose loss Mary Chesnut bemoaned toward more cisatlantic and explicitly sectional modes.

So, for instance, other poems in Simms's 1867 anthology specify further that living, binding tie he theorizes as the anchor of Confederate politics. Take for example Catherine M. Warfield's saber-rattling poem "You Can Never Win Them Back," whose eponymous taunt summarizes Warfield's sense that northerners lack the Cavalier blood now fortifying the Confederate secession:

You have no such blood as theirs
 for the shedding,
 In the veins of Cavaliers
 was its heading.
 You have no such stately men
 In your abolitionist den,
 To march through foe and fen,
 Nothing dreading. (Simms, p. 15)

Here, the bare essentials of an emergent proto-national algorithm whereby the very blood spilled in defeat somehow reverses that defeat. Saturating "the earth / That smiled upon their birth," the blood of southern heroes now consecrates the Confederacy for which they die, because the invaders "have no such stately men" to constitute an analogous sacrifice. Crucially, the blood shed from the veins of Confederates is English blood, the blood of Cavaliers channeled along a trajectory or "heading" (dating presumably from the time of Cromwell if not of William the Conqueror). Although

tautological, the prophecy is underwritten by the future anteriority that racial teleology always affords. In Warfield's expression of the destiny toward which the southern race seems to hearken, Confederate Cavaliers "may fall before the fire of your legions, / Paid in gold for murd'rous hire – bought allegiance! / But for every drop you shed / You shall leave a mound of dead; And the vultures shall be fed in our regions" (15).

Other poems in *War Poetry of the South* draw out this continuum between English Cavaliers and southern secessionists. In Frank Ticknor's "The Virginians of the Shenandoah Valley," Confederates become courtly knights protecting the hallowed grounds of lordly forefathers. Precisely as "The knightliest of the knightly race / Who, since days of old, / Have kept the lamp of chivalry / Alight in hearts of gold," southern secessionists revive a seemingly ancient tradition of noblesse and chivalric integrity. Perhaps that connection accounts for Simms's inclusion in the collection of "Marching to Death," written by South Carolinian J. Herbert Sass in 1862 as a tribute to British troops who had died aboard a sinking transport (perhaps during the Crimean War, although Sass does not specify a context). Although without a clear reference to the U.S. Civil War other than its inclusion in Simms's anthology, the poem imagines these Britons bravely standing at attention as they descend into the waves, in this way reminding other southrons of the inherited qualities to see them through their own moment of trial. For that matter, John Esten Cook's popular "The Song of the Rebel" (first published in the 23 January 1863 issue of the *Southern Illustrated News* before its inclusion in Abram Joseph Ryan's 1866, London-published collection, *War Lyrics and Songs of the South*) plots the intersection of southern nativity and a mythologized English and chivalric order, describing General J. E. B. Stuart as if out of the charge of the light brigade, his "floating plume" "Surrounded by his gallant band / Of Southern cavaliers."¹⁰

In such treatments of the conflict a certain genealogical transaction affords a particular historical vantage that, in turn, underwrites a national prospectus. Similar associations of the war with various constructions of English history fueled much wartime composition in the South, and yet this kind of historical conflation enjoyed a still longer provenance. Indeed, the state of mind in which such ways of versing the conflict seemed so patently applicable had formed over the course of a decade, proliferating in poetry, serial publication, and novels published in both regions. Henry Herbert's *Wager of Battle*, which editorialized over the injustice of slavery through its melodramatic portrayal of liberty-loving yet subjugated Saxon serfs of the twelfth century, would reach *National Era*'s considerable

audience from 1853 to 1855 before being bound by Mason and Brothers in 1855.¹¹ Herbert's narrative seems to have been rejoined by Tennessee congressman Lucien Bonaparte Chase, whose 1854 novel *English Serfdom and American Slavery* focuses on a contemporaneous English class system that reduces struggling English workers to modern-day serfs – not to build a sympathetic analogy between that suffering and the subjugation endured by U.S. slaves, but rather to reveal English abolitionist critique to be insensitive to class injustice inflicted on whites. To that end, and after dedicating his novel “To the Aristocratic Ladies of Great Britain,” Chase dramatizes harrowing conditions endured by white laborers in England who are subject to every sort of crime and bereft of the barest social or legal standing.¹² When the novel's chief apologist for U.S. slavery lectures his audience of English abolitionists (who consist of either naïve idealists or conscious manipulators), he insists “that when Great Britain [...] assumes, with the cant of a hypocrite, to lecture us about the sinfulness of holding mankind in bondage, she deserves the execrations of men and the vengeance of heaven.” “[W]hatever debasement is exhibited by the black is owing to *race* not *servitude*,” he continues, but in England, “the negro-loving government of the British empire [...] *willfully* murder[s] her people. What reduces them to starvation? It is primogeniture, the national debt, her system of rents, and the policy of inclosing vast tracts of fertile land in parks” (209). Although such passages seek to deprive English abolitionists of moral standing from which to comment on U.S. slavery, Chase's novel also registers, in its very subtitle, the dispersed perspective pervading so much of this sectional and yet transnational literary productivity: *Ourselves – As Others See Us*. For if on the one hand the novel challenges an English view of southern institutions, on the other, it also addresses itself to a southern planting class whose interests Chase articulates and whose perspective he adopts in revealing how English “Others” “See Us.” So even as the novel seeks to unsettle a complacency it locates in England – a nation where severe class oppression coexists with a strident abolitionism conveniently focused upon foreign scenery – its retreat into sectional identification also disperses its viewpoint across longitudes of transnational affiliation.

Mary Chesnut would have understood how those impulses mix, as would have Simms, and for that matter Whittier, or George Fitzhugh in *Cannibals, All! Or, Slaves Without Masters* (1857), which like Chase's novel calls attention to the evils of British wage slavery to present chattel slavery as a more benevolent system, or even Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Reply to “The Affectionate and Christian Address of Many*

Thousands of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, to their Sisters, the Women of the United States of America" (1863) both praises the petition originally presented Stowe in 1853 and laments what she describes as a rapid decline in abolitionist sentiment among those English who are "the very blood relations of the liberty-loving Puritans."¹³ The diversity of their political views notwithstanding, each of these writers strives to overcome English example by reversing a current of transatlantic corrective.

And yet, in 1861 the *National Intelligencer* reported the remarks of a Georgian subscriber who proposed that, in the event of a Union military victory, the Confederate government should simply "offer the country to England as a colony."¹⁴ This expression of a proleptic colonial desire is actually a wish for rewinding history, or at least to reconfigure the revolution and its nationalizing effects. And for such American gestures of transnational realignment, English writers also enfolded the terms of U.S. sectional crisis within longer Anglo-American trajectories. Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), whose principle character struggles to restore a Jacobite monarchy before accepting England's unreconstructed future as a Protestant nation, begins with a description of Henry, now a Virginian planter whose "purchased negroes, obeyed him with an eagerness such as the most severe task-masters round about us could never get from their people."¹⁵ Although most of the narrative transpires in England, the closing pages return to Virginia, where "In our Transatlantic country," Henry and his family are now contented Potomac planters. "Our diamonds are turned into ploughs and axes for our plantations," he muses, "and into negroes, the happiest and the merriest, I think, in all this country [...]" (452) That fantasy of a landed and loyal English nobility now transformed to benevolent taskmasters – their royal jewels, as it were, now transmogrified to loyal chattel – also permeates Thackeray's prequel to *Henry Esmond* serialized from 1857 to 1859 in *Harper's The Virginians*. There, we are told that the swath of Virginia to which Esmond relocates at the finale of *Henry Esmond* is "fondly modelled after the English customs," populated by country squires who "boasted that King Charles II had been king in Virginia before he had been king in England." "The resident gentry," Thackeray explains,

were allied to good English families. They held their heads above the Dutch traders of New York, and the money-getting Roundheads of Pennsylvania and New England. Never were people less republican than those of the great province which was soon to be foremost in the memorable revolt against the British Crown.¹⁶

And so on. *The Virginians* extends the intimations that close *Henry Esmond*, those hints that root North American slavery in a mythos of chivalric gentry and noblesse oblige. For by the time of Esmond's removal to Virginia, in that "state almost feudal," Thackeray explains, "The question of Slavery was not born," because

To be the proprietor of black servants shocked the feelings of no Virginian gentleman; nor, in truth, was the despotism exercised over the negro race generally a savage one. The food was plenty; the poor black people lazy and not unhappy. You might have preached negro emancipation to Madam Esmond of Castlewood as you might have told her to let the horses run loose out of her stables; she had no doubt but that the whip and the corn-bag were good for both.¹⁷

The unfolding of Thackeray's narrative in *Harper's* became a mass media event as constantly familiar among U.S. readers during the nearly two years of its serialization as had been *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *National Era*, inciting responses in northern and southern journals, prompting letters to editors (one young reader asked who would carry on the novel when Thackeray died), and otherwise becoming a widely circulated point of reference.¹⁸ One of the reviews, a piece published in *Fraser's* and then *Littell's Living Age* in 1865 – just as the war was ending and six years after the novel had been bound by Harper's and Brothers – takes *The Virginians* as an opportunity to draw a highly critical account of Virginian history. The problem with Virginians and with *The Virginians*, the *Fraser's* writer explains, is that a southern pretense to Englishness obscures the fact that temperamental and cultural connections to England had waned over the course of decades and now centuries. Describing a failed experiment carried out decades before to populate the state with English skylarks, the *Fraser's* writer reports having seen and heard one of the few survivors of the original colonizing flock. "The song which then arrested my attention only by its novelty and sweetness," he remarks, "has gathered in the years that have passed since then a plaintive and almost mystic quality."

As I recall it now it sings much that as a boy I could not understand, – of a generation of true gentlemen and gentlewomen, long ago past and buried, with fewer representatives left than of the skylarks they brought with them, and which only lived to sing their requiem. Little did I dream then that where this melody alone startled the summer air, the shrieking shell and hurtling cannon-ball were soon to bring their horrible music; that those silver waters were to redden with the blood of the young companions with whom I played on its banks; that the homes I had known

so full of joy were in a few years to become charred and desolate monuments of the devastations and sorrows of War [...] For the present I distinguish my little songster's theme of the olden time, and hear it as finely linked to the time now swiftly passing away. To record some impressions of that Past, and trace some aims of the Present, is the aim of this paper.¹⁹

The idea that the war sweeps aside a southern order that was also somehow English speaks to those wider fantasies of transnational affiliation to which much Civil War writing gave vent. Participating in the North Atlantic trope according to which birdsong renders sublime our sensations of loss – itself another act of ventriloquy channeling the poetics of Wordsworth and Keats toward “olden times” and their apocalypse in the U.S. South – further instills that sense of mythic Englishness even as the writer elegizes its passing. How contrary a transnational gesture, in that sense, is Walt Whitman's 1860 edition of the *Leaves of Grass*. There Whitman directs his own anxieties over the probability of national disintegration through birdsong, but he also joins “Chants Democratic” into the premonitory agenda those birds' arias announce. That addition to *Leaves of Grass* draws the 1860 edition's forebodings into a strain of transnational tribute both more and less “brood”ing:

Great is the English speech – what speech is so great as the English?

Great is the English brood – what brood has so vast a destiny as the English?

It is the mother of the brood that must rule the earth with the new rule [...]²⁰

The English brood here is that same vast, storied civilization Emerson extols in his 1856 *English Traits*; “the best of actual nations,” “an island famous for immortal laws, for the announcements of original right which make the stone tablets of liberty.”²¹ For Whitman that brood now expands across North America in realization of a “vast destiny” now indistinguishable from the sort typically associated with John O'Sullivan and indeed Whitman's own prophetically nationalist vision. And yet, another addition to the 1860 edition of *Leaves* identifies with European revolutionaries who would topple that order, the “Foiled Revolter or Revoltress” to whom Whitman addresses himself in the poem of that title. Whitman, writing just before the opening of armed conflict, places the pursuit of liberty in a frame that encompasses the European revolutions of 1847–1848 (checked in England, however, with the thwarting of the Chartist movement), linking that instance of popular uprising to his own moment and location through the repeated alignments of

first-person singular. “What we believe in,” he insists, “waits latent forever” across the civilizations of the globe. His address of the revolter or revoltress as “my brother or my sister,” like his referencing of populist revolution to the imagery of enslavement and insurrection – imagining that militant and galvanized community “elated at the sight of slaves, no matter who they are” even while supposing that in the temporary halt of the European revolutionary movement, “The prison, scaffold, garrote, hand-cuff, iron necklace and anklet, lead-balls, do their work” – conflates politically galvanized populations otherwise separated by oceans.²² And so the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* both despairs over the coming of the war and exults in what that conflict might signify, all the while cleaving to other abstractions of transatlantic association. In that way, Whitman was a typical wartime writer whose preoccupations at home – his worries for his country, his sense that it might not last – drew him necessarily into fraught considerations abroad.

Notes

- 1 Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, C. Vann Woodward et al. (eds.) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 242. Further citations to this edition are made parenthetically as *MC*.
- 2 On 19 November 1861, for instance, Chesnut imagines “Something good [is] obliged to come of such a stupid blunder” as the Trent affair, whereas during the previous August she had quoted *King John* V, vii: “Naught can make us rue / If England to herself do rest but true” (*MC* 238, 132).
- 3 John Greenleaf Whittier, “To Englishmen,” *The Independent* 14 (30 Jan. 1862), 1.
- 4 Although from one perspective much of this work extends from Robert Weisbuch’s call for a transatlantic literary historiography in *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986), Amanda Claybaugh makes the point that Weisbuch’s notion of a literary rivalry between American and British writers has been widely discarded. See Claybaugh, “New Fields, Conventional Habits, and the Legacy of *Atlantic Double-Cross*,” *American Literary History* 20 (2008), 439–448. Still, more recent works develop the exceptionalist model according to which, as Weisbuch would have it, U.S. writers labored under a mission to distinguish a national literature apart from a preponderance of English influence. For instance, Sam W. Haynes argues in *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007) that an early American appetite for all things British rendered the antebellum United States “a cultural and economic satellite of the British Empire” (p. 10). Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750–1850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

Press, 2007) similarly suggests that during the century he examines, “most writers and readers in America considered themselves to be members of the generic English culture that we generally mean by ‘British culture,’ and they thought of their literature as products of such a culture” (p. 1), although for Tennenhouse a wider sense of diasporic Englishness mitigated the sense that U.S. readers and writers were subject to the sort of cultural hegemony Weisbuch posits. Still less invested in model of cultural rivalry found in Weisbuch and Haynes, Elisa Tamarkin’s *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) maps the patterns of endearment through which antebellum Americans imitated, appropriated, and otherwise affiliated with English models of self-fashioning, reform, education, and aristocracy. On the subject of Anglo-American literary production and distribution prior to the passage of International Copyright, see Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007) and Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Lastly, my own *America’s England: Antebellum Literature and Atlantic Sectionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) offers an account of the pendular rapport antebellum and bellum Americans entertained toward various notions of Englishness – finding in English medieval history, picturesque landscape, global economy, and transatlantic telecommunication occasions to codify U.S. sectional antipathies.

- 5 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Emancipation in the British West Indies,” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Edward Emerson (ed.), 14 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), vol. 11, p. 123; and “New England, Lecture 1,” in *The Late Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson (eds.), 2 vols. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), vol. 1, p. 11.
- 6 Emerson, “Fortune of the Republic,” *Late Lectures*, vol. 2, p. 323.
- 7 See William Gilmore Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, William Gilmore Simms (ed.) (New York: Richardson and Company, 1867), p. 57. Further citations to poems in this collection are made parenthetically.
- 8 Strikingly, however often poets publishing during the war in outlets such as the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the *Charleston Mercury*, or *De Bow’s* apply rhetorics of racial difference in accounting for the conflict, they seldom refer to people of African descent. Indeed, much Confederate poetry presents inhabitants of the northern states – and certainly of New England – as racially different from white people living in the South. For such writers that variance had proven more destabilizing to the Union than the merely topical issue of slavery ever could. For more on this point, see Philip Guedalla, *The Hundred Years* (New York: Literary Guild, 1936), pp. 86–87; Richard Bonner, “Roundheaded Cavaliers? The Context and Limits of a Confederate Racial Project,” *Civil War History* 48 (2002), 34–59; Christopher Hanlon, *America’s England: Antebellum Literature and*

- Atlantic Sectionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 29–34; and Ritchie Watson, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), pp. 1–18.
- 9 Opening his book with the “pre-Confederate” southern literature of the 1850s, and especially the early stirrings of nationalist literature found over the course of that decade in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Coleman Hutchison indicates his similar sense that Civil War literature must encompass the period of intense sectionalism after the Compromise of 1850. See Hutchison, *Apples and Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), p. 19: “The phrase ‘southern literary nationalism’ had multiple and at times conflicting significations during this period; one particular problem lies in determining which nation these nationalists hoped to imagine, the United States of America or some alternative thereof.” Calling on the work of the cultural theorist Gregory Jusdanis, Hutchison makes the case for viewing decades of prior southern literary production as part of a long Confederacy, a process of “cultural integration” belonging to the same political-historical trajectory that culminated in the secession (pp. 20–21).
 - 10 Abram Joseph Ryan, *War Lyrics and Songs of the South*, Abram Joseph Ryan (ed.) (London: Pottiswoode and Company, 1866), p. 48.
 - 11 Henry William Herbert, *Wager of Battle: A Tale of Saxon Slavery in Sherwood Forest* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1855).
 - 12 Dedication page of Lucien B. Chase, *English Serfdom and American Slavery: Ourselves – As Others See Us* (New York: H. Long & Brother, 1854).
 - 13 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Reply to “The Affectionate and Christian Address of Many Thousands of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, to their Sisters, the Women of the United States of America”* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Company, 1863), p. 58.
 - 14 Quoted in “Eternal Hate to the North,” *Liberator* 31 (7 June 1861), 1.
 - 15 William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, 24 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1869), vol. 7, p. 16.
 - 16 Thackeray, “The Virginians: Chapter 3,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 16 (Dec. 1857), 102.
 - 17 *Ibid.*
 - 18 In general, U.S. reviewers criticized the novel for its irreverent treatment of George Washington and for the thinness of its plot, but the novel’s treatment of slavery also proved a point on which several reviewers would elaborate. See, for instance, “Washington, Thackeray,” *Emerson’s Magazine and Putnam’s Monthly* 6 (April 1858), 434–436, as well as “Editor’s Table,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 26 (Feb. 1858), 152.
 - 19 See “Virginia, First and Last,” *Littell’s Living Age* 29 (8 April 1865), 1.
 - 20 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), p. 202.

- 21 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols., Joseph Slater and Robert E. Spiller (eds.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971–2013), vol. 5, pp. 169, 174.
- 22 Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 394, 396, 395. To be sure, “To a Failed Revolter or Revoltress” recapitulates themes Whitman developed in his 1850 “Resurgemus,” where Whitman imagines the revolts of 1848 as a moment wherein “Suddenly, out of its stale and drowsy air, the air of slaves, / Like lightning Europe le’pt forth [...]” See Whitman, “Resurgemus,” *New York Daily Tribune* 21 (June 1850), 3.

CHAPTER 4

*The “American Renaissance” after
the American Civil War*

Randall Fuller

... the war is a new glass to see all our old things through

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Let us extend one of American history’s favorite counterfactual exercises into the literary realm: If the South had won the Civil War, which antebellum authors would we read today? Which authors would we consider the originators of a new literary nationalism? Which would comprise our “American Renaissance”?

The last question refers of course to F. O. Matthiessen’s towering *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941), a landmark critical work that almost single-handedly inserted American literature into a twentieth-century university setting and completed a process of national canon formation that had begun in the middle of the nineteenth century. Matthiessen consolidated antebellum literary production into five representative authors – Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman – defending his choice by claiming that “the successive generations of common readers, who make the decisions, would seem finally to have agreed that the authors of the pre-Civil War era who bulk largest in stature are the five who are my subject.” Matthiessen conceded that although other antebellum writers had sold more books and enjoyed greater fame, the five members of his American Renaissance deserved special attention because each exhibited “devotion to the possibilities of democracy.” And despite future efforts by the academy to extend the canon by including women and minority writers, as well as to reformulate what is meant by a literary text, his core group of “important” antebellum authors has remained remarkably durable.¹

But would that be the case if the South had won the war? *American Renaissance* begins with an extended study of Emerson because, as Matthiessen observed, not only was Emerson “the cow from which the

rest drew their milk" but also "the impulse from Emerson was the most pervasive and far reaching, and . . . [because] Whitman's extension of many of Emerson's values carried far down into the period after the Civil War."² In a postwar era shaped and dominated by the Confederate States of America, would Emerson's cultural significance have remained so durable? The writer who actively lectured against the Fugitive Slave Act throughout the 1850s, who famously declared John Brown's execution a christic and consecrating act in the battle for abolition, and who remarked shortly after the start of hostilities that "Sometimes gun powder smells good"³ – surely such a writer would be viewed by postwar Southerners as a parlous instigator, a reckless provocateur edging the nation ever closer to a homicidal and unnecessary war. Without Emerson to summon into existence a specific form of literary nationalism, Thoreau would likely dwindle in interest, becoming a minor nature writer regrettably influenced by a discredited mentor, while Whitman, famously brought to a boil by Emerson, would forfeit his reputation as the "good gray poet" who expressed the nation's grief with elegiac poems commemorating Lincoln's death.

The results of this counterfactual imagining are less clear with Hawthorne and Melville, both of whom were affiliated with the Democratic Party, both of whom saw American history as tragic, and both of whom tended to view the war with far more misgivings than their transcendental associates. But even here, the shift of cultural influence south of the Mason-Dixon line would surely have meant an attenuation in both authors' reach and currency; it would have meant a Boston-New York publishing industry isolated from Southern cultural centers, with less publicity and fewer editions of Northern books. What this counterfactual exercise suggests, in other words, is something many of us already know: that a literary canon is always a way of imagining the past and that the American Renaissance was one such historically conditioned way to do so.

But it also suggests that to an extent we seldom bother to consider a handful of Northern writers came to be regarded as "classic" in no small part because of the Union victory in the Civil War. Had the South been victorious, it is possible to imagine completely different matrices of writers – Edgar Allan Poe, William Gilmore Simms, Richard Henry Wilder, Henry Timrod, and even the colloquy of "anti-Tom" novelists – whose works might to this day set the terms and conditions by which we understand American literature. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, with its origins myth of national literary culture, is simply inconceivable without the Northern victory of the Civil War. American literature as we now know it is in large part a product of cultural memory after the Civil War.

I take my cue from two eminent historians of the Civil War. The first of these is David W. Blight, whose *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* inaugurated the study of the cultural remembrance of the conflict. According to Blight, in the decades after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Americans "made choices to remember and forget their Civil War,"⁴ ultimately selecting memories that highlighted national healing at the expense of racial justice. The second historian is Mark S. Neely, who reminds us that one consequence of the Civil War was the "conscious reassertion of New England identity that left the region's *historical* image perhaps as triumphant as it had ever been since the end of the seventeenth century."⁵ The ideas of these two scholars are linked. The long-standing New England-centered approach to American literary historiography, which began just before the onset of war, would become part of a larger project to remember the war in ways that emphasized healing and unification in the final three decades of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the concept of a New England literary "renaissance" emerged soon after the end of hostilities. George William Curtis first coined the term with reference to a nascent literary culture in an 1869 editorial for the New York-based *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Describing "the famous intellectual *Renaissance* of twenty-five years ago," Curtis praised the bygone transcendental period as "a *spiritual* fermentation from which some of the best modern influences in this country have proceeded." The significance of these words is easy to overlook. Curtis, a prestigious Northern opinion maker and one-time participant in the Brook Farm experiment, was also one of the founders of the Republican Party. As a representative of postwar power, he sought to frame the cultural past in terms that would legitimize Northern supremacy. And in an era marked verbally by the prefix indicating a return to previous conditions (*reconstruction*, *reunion*, *reconciliation*), he sought to evoke a new past that would help define and direct the nation's common values. The cultural *renaissance* he described was as much a product of postwar requirements and urgencies as it was a historically coherent moment. Commemorating antebellum transcendentalism as a movement "from which some of the best modern influences in this country have proceeded," Curtis advanced a politics of memory that identified New England as the repository of northern values.⁶

If he was the first to employ the word "renaissance" to describe the New England literary field, Curtis nevertheless was a latecomer to the contest over the ideological memory of the nation's literary and intellectual origins. The Civil War was in its third year when Moncure Daniel Conway

sought to sway English public opinion toward the Northern cause in an 1864 *Fraser's Magazine* think piece, titled "The Transcendentalists of Concord." A Unitarian minister, prolific journalist, second-generation transcendentalist, and tireless advocate of women's rights and abolitionism, Conway described the town where Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and Hawthorne lived and wrote as "the arena of a nobler revolution [than the American Revolution], – that against creeds and forms whose time had come to pass away." Fusing elegy and celebration, Conway found in Concord's pastoral setting the birthplace of intellectual freedom and the communal embodiment of values for which the North was currently waging war. His typically prolix article stressed Emerson's renunciation of the pulpit, Margaret Fuller's "Conversations," the birth of Brook Farm, and Bronson Alcott's ill-fated experimental school as examples of nonconformist thought and activity. But the essay's subtext simmered in Conway's autobiographical account of his own boyhood spent on a slave-owning plantation in Virginia. There, a random encounter with Emerson's *Essays* triggered a moral and psychological transformation that prompted him to cast off the shackles of his Southern heritage and to repudiate slavery as a universal evil. Implicit in this emancipatory narrative was a vision of New England literary culture as the rightful claimant to the title of American literature: a kind of writing committed to progressive movements in general and to abolition in particular. (At one point Conway emphasized this point in the negative by stating, "Mr. Hawthorne was the only literary man in America who has not given his voice against slavery.")⁷

Conway's effort to create a mythic memory of cultural origins gained momentum with an anonymous 1864 response to his essay, first published in the English *Saturday Review* and quickly reprinted in *Littell's Living Age*. According to the author of "A Transcendental Mecca," Conway's circle of Concord eccentrics "stimulated the national mind of the Federal Americans" by producing a literature that "answer[ed] to the assertion of high purposes." "[H]aunted with the thoughts of a nobler life," antebellum transcendentalists recoiled "from the abyss of arrogant comfort." Here literature became a ground registering the very sectional tensions that had provoked the war. The "arrogant comfort" against which New England's literati supposedly bristled was not only to the commercial interests of Boston but also, in coded language Northerners certainly would have understood, to the slaveholding South.⁸

The concept of a New England renaissance (which initially included the Fireside poets and excluded New Yorkers Whitman and Melville) received its first academic articulation in Charles F. Richardson's *American*

Literature, 1607–1885, a two-volume history published in 1886. (One of Richardson's first acts as Winkley Chair of English at Dartmouth was to add a three-hour course in American literature to the college's curriculum – at the time an unprecedented and even radical feat.⁹) The model for many subsequent accounts, Richardson's study was an effort to fabricate de novo a literary tradition for the academy. Combining a comprehensive history with authoritative critical pronouncements, he deployed then current theories of race and linguistics to describe a Saxon culture gradually "Americanized" through geographical isolation and a sustained commitment to religious freedom. In his impressionistic description, factors of race and climate combined to create a distinctive "American mind" whose development was revealed to be historically progressive: "American isolation promoted active religious work; religion soon demanded political freedom as well as spiritual; and the free prayer and the free vote left the whole mind free." Eschewing any sustained discussion of wartime writing, he instead focused on figures deemed "major" enough to warrant advanced academic study. But within the emergent context of an academic national literature, the Civil War repeatedly was portrayed as a historical necessity, an event that led to the reunification of America and therefore to the construction of a coherent academic field. Beneath a subheading meant to reinforce this point – "The United States a Nation" – Richardson situated the conflict in a reassuring narrative that led inexorably toward an integrated, revitalized national identity:

By the development of national character in the fight for independence; by later experience in war and peace; by struggle, victory, and defeat of party and faction; by annexation and abandonment of territory by settlement of political, financial, and social questions; and finally by four years of war, it has come to pass that the existence and the sovereignty of the nation have been made secure.¹⁰

Central to this account of national reconciliation and purpose was Richardson's "New England Transcendental Renaissance," which was responsible for inaugurating a distinctive and representative literature. "Southern provincialism before the war," Richardson explained, had prohibited a sensibility "... sufficiently keen-eyed to see that provincial types and scenes ... may be made contributions to national or even universal literature." As a result, the "seeds of American literature were most effectively sown in New England." Writing a quarter century after the war, Richardson undertook the work of reunion and reconciliation by passing the literary torch from North to South in a gesture of shared victory. "Before the war [the South] was the *ancient régime*, picturesque

and peculiar; then came the storm and stress of conflict that burned the South – far more than the North – with searing flame; now rises the new South, a patriotic part of the common country."¹¹

By the end of the nineteenth century, the war's role in securing a stable national identity – in settling "political, financial, and social questions" – was even more pointedly evoked in Barrett Wendell's highly influential *A Literary History of America* (1900), which reinforced and, in many ways, institutionalized the concept of a New England literary renaissance. A Boston blueblood and lifetime professor at Harvard, Wendell discovered a resemblance between the writers of antebellum New England and the poets and dramatists of Elizabethan England. He also reiterated Richardson's claims for an indigenous literature founded in his native city and commensurate with America's political and cultural promise. From the vantage of a later generation, however, Wendell saw the war as the originary source for a future literary greatness. "In the days of conflict," he observed, "North regarded South, and South North, as the incarnation of evil. Time, however, has begun its healing work; at last our country begins to understand itself better than ever before." Wendell went even further than Richardson, finding in the war period both the idealism and the dramatic conflicts necessary for world-class writing: "A literature which in the same years could produce works so utterly antagonistic in superficial sentiment, and yet so harmonious in their common sincerity and loftiness of feeling, is a literature from which riches may come." According to Wendell, the "Renaissance of New England" produced "the most remarkable literary expression which has yet declared itself in America." It did so because its "new spirit" was "like that which aroused old Italy to a fresh sense of civilized antiquity." This new spirit was, however, a product of the receding past for "the outburst of material force which throughout the victorious North followed the period of the Civil War" had resulted in the cultural dominance of New York, and especially of Whitman, who was "professedly the most democratic of American writers" and the direct heir of Emersonian transcendentalism. Indeed, Whitman was accorded the honor of a frontispiece portrait in Wendell's literary history. From the South he also anticipated "a spirit which shall give beauty and power to the American letters of the future."¹²

Writing after the collapse of Reconstruction and during a period of heightened imperial aspirations, Wendell breezily dismissed as "superficial" those differences that had produced the organized violence and unimaginable death of civil war. He did so to reveal how a shared but unspecified idealism (a "loftiness") had produced a literary tradition

whose “riches” could now be exploited and even exported. In a rhetorical gesture common in the decades after the war, Wendell celebrated military devotion and sacrifice in a manner that ignored questions of morality. And he accomplished this without mentioning a single instance of African American authorship.

Of the five authors that eventually comprised F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, two would not survive the war (Thoreau and Hawthorne) and another would die in almost complete obscurity decades later (Melville). Only two (Emerson and Whitman) found their popularity immediately enhanced by the federal victory. Yet the postwar consolidation of a New England renaissance would help shape the reputation of each author in the coming years, even those with no immediate connection to New England. Whitman, discussed at length elsewhere in this volume, experienced renewed critical interest during the half-century that followed the publication of his collection of Civil War verse, *Drum-Taps*. Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Emerson each benefited from a carefully cultivated image of New England literary culture burnished in the postbellum years. Only Melville, also discussed in a separate chapter in this volume, would remain an outlier during the nineteenth century.

Yet, if New England literature assumed greater primacy and explanatory force after the war, it did so by repeatedly ignoring the controversial role its authors played in the conflict over slavery and disunion. The writings of Emerson, for instance, were re-presented as radically depoliticized, indeed as radically *poeticized*, in the years following the war. Those years not only marked a renewal of Emerson's reputation, but also were the most active and remunerative he ever experienced on the lecture circuit. In 1866, the first of numerous *Complete Works* (this one a pirated British edition) appeared. By 1872, an international observer could remark, “The enthusiasm with which Ralph Waldo Emerson is greeted in every part of the United States is a phenomenon which cannot escape the attention of those who study the affairs and tendencies of that country”.¹³ And between 1865 and the posthumous publication of his *Journals* in 1909, Emerson became an increasingly popular and mainstream figure who spoke for the spiritual and literary beliefs, values, and attitudes of many nineteenth-century Americans. Schools and universities were even named after him. On the walls of these institutions, his portrait accompanied those of Washington and Lincoln.

Yet despite the process of canonization made possible by the war's outcome, Emerson's career was expunged of his role in the agitation of the 1850s and the war itself. In nearly every early academic literary history

from 1880 to 1915 the socially engaged author the 1850s and 1860s disappears from view. Not surprisingly, *The Conduct of Life* and *English Traits* – works that have generated considerable scholarly attention during the past two decades – were demoted to marginal status after the war, typically described as tepid reiterations of the more vital and earlier *Nature* and *Essays*. W. P. Trent and John Erskine, in their influential 1912 *Great American Writers*, are exemplary in their insistence that the later works are merely “restatements or applications of the [earlier] ideas.... The remainder of [Emerson’s] life contributed nothing essentially new to his work.” During a period in which the memory of war was still contested, the Emerson described in dozens of literary histories and discussed in a growing number of survey courses on American literature was a youthful transcendentalist whose call for a national literature in “The American Scholar” served as the Plymouth Rock of American literature, “a veritable Independence Day for American scholarship.”¹⁴ As Bliss Perry wrote in 1918, summarizing what had then hardened into conventional wisdom, “The reader who has mastered [*Nature*, “The American Scholar,” and the Divinity School Address] by the Concord Transcendentalist in 1836, 1837, and 1838 has the key to Emerson.”¹⁵

Thoreau and Hawthorne garnered similar critical trajectories. Ticknor & Fields, the formidable Boston-based firm, published *Walden, or Life in the Woods* in 1854. But it refused his request to reprint his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, reasoning that Thoreau’s work was simply not commercial enough to warrant further investment. That changed after the firing on Fort Sumter. The publishing house, which also owned the *Atlantic Monthly*, quickly began a vigorous campaign to solicit works from the author. In February 1862, for instance, the *Atlantic*’s editor, James T. Fields, wrote to ask for as many essays as Thoreau could provide. This request was motivated by several factors. Fields had recently replaced James Russell Lowell as the journal’s editor, effectively ending a feud between Thoreau and Lowell. It is also likely that Fields knew Thoreau was dying of tuberculosis.

But it is worth considering the wartime context for the editor’s sudden interest in Thoreau’s writing. At roughly the same time he requested work from Thoreau, he rejected fiction by Louisa May Alcott because, as he told her, the *Atlantic* “has Mss. enough on hand for a dozen numbers & has to choose war stories if [it] can, to suit the times.”¹⁶ Something about Thoreau’s writing, in other words, fulfilled the expectations of a literary marketplace reconfigured by civil war. The notoriety Thoreau had gained by defending the abolitionist John Brown

certainly contributed to Fields's interest. More subtly, Thoreau's devotion to New England's natural surroundings coincided with an ideological rhetoric that associated the region's abolitionist sentiments with a colder climate and boundless pine forests. Throughout the war, Ticknor & Fields reversed its earlier course and aggressively publicized Thoreau's writing, which it published in the *Atlantic* and produced in four new volumes: *Excursions* in 1863, *The Maine Woods* in 1864, *Cape Cod* in 1865, and *A Yankee in Canada, with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers* in 1866. Describing the writer as "a purely American product," a reviewer for the *Atlantic* attributed the "steadily growing fame of Thoreau" to timeless and universal aspects embedded in the very New England landscapes he described. "The infinite fascinations of mountains and of forests will outlast this war and the next," wrote this reviewer after the publication of *The Maine Woods*, "and the race that makes the war."¹⁷

Likewise, for a decade after the war Ticknor & Fields continued its relentless promotion of Nathaniel Hawthorne, which had begun early in the 1850s with the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*. Like Emerson, Hawthorne would become a cultural institution thanks in no small part to the active promotion and merchandising of Fields, who serialized Hawthorne's works in the *Atlantic* and brought out posthumous uniform editions of Hawthorne's notebooks and abortive final romances to accompany his better known novels and stories. Hawthorne by no means fit the profile of abolitionist author who so often appeared in the *Atlantic*. In fact, he produced one of the most scathing antiwar essays about the conflict, "Chiefly about War-Matters," which appeared in that publication in 1862, where he complained bitterly of the magazine's propensity for "Black Republicanism." (Hawthorne went on to dedicate his last book to Franklin Pierce, the Democratic former president despised by those opposed to slavery.) Yet, in the years following his death and the treaty at Appomattox, his works were invariably stripped of the political, the contextual, and the ideological. The author's "most cultivated" readers, according to an anonymous 1868 article entitled "The Genius of Hawthorne," "best appreciate the wonder of that power by which he wakes into clear consciousness shades of feelings and delicacies of thought."¹⁸ An 1870 article entitled "Americanism in Literature," written by the firebrand abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson, argued that "Emerson set free the poetic intuition of America, Hawthorne its imagination."¹⁹ Or as yet another *Atlantic* essay, "The Solitude of Hawthorne," suggested in its very title, the author was best understood as completely unmoored from the social and political entanglements of his time.²⁰

The construction of these three authors' critical images occurred as the nation sought to finesse profound disagreements over race and equality that were not fully resolved by the destructive war. Shaped by the need for healing and reunion in the wake of horrific devastation and a new sociopolitical order, postwar versions of American literature tended to stress "Concord" through images of regeneration and rebirth – through *renaissance* – that took precedence over division and sectionalism. New England literary culture was reconfigured as a pastoral movement located in a distant, sun-dappled past strikingly empty of social and racial tensions.

Sometime in the autumn of 1942 the Harvard literary scholar F. O. Matthiessen wrote to the U. S. Marines Corps and offered to enlist in its Combat Intelligence division. "[W]ith the 18 year old drafts," he explained, "my work will no longer be essential at Harvard, and I want to serve my country as actively as possible." Short, myopic, and middle-aged, Matthiessen offered an unusual qualification for his otherwise inauspicious enlistment: a book he had recently completed: "My chief aim in that book was to reaffirm the ideals and values that are to be found in our democratic literature."²¹

That book was *American Renaissance* – a sprawling, ambitious, genre-defining literary history that had been conceived in much the same spirit as those earlier works of canon formation and cultural suasion by George William Curtis, Moncure Daniel Conway, Charles F. Richardson, and Barrett Wendell. Writing during the Great Depression and on the eve of the most destructive war in human history, Matthiessen hoped to summon a literary past that would not so much redirect American society toward a desired future as provide a bulwark against the world-historical turmoil that threatened to tear it to pieces. The critic-scholar Robert Spiller astutely recognized the impulse underlying *American Renaissance* when he praised it in the *Saturday Review* and observed, "In an era of crisis, a people naturally turns to its historians and critics and prophets for reassurance of its faith in its own destiny."²²

Given this background, it is surprising that Matthiessen's titanic work makes almost no mention whatsoever of the Civil War – the crisis that had helped create a "New England renaissance" in the first place. The explanation for this absence can be traced in part to the book's scope. Matthiessen famously narrowed his focus in *American Renaissance* to the fertile period of 1850–1855, a single "extraordinarily concentrated moment"²³ when his five authors collectively produced a cascade of brilliant novels, essays, lectures, and poetry, including *Moby-Dick*, *Walden*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *House of the Seven Gables*, and *Leaves of Grass*. Moreover, as a critic committed

to the still-new trend of aesthetic formalism, he was unwilling or unable to see creditable literary works in the polemical speeches of Emerson and Thoreau or even the knotted wartime poetry of Melville. But equally significant is the fact that Matthiessen inherited his authors from prior generations of critics who had scrupulously banished political disunion and social unrest from their postwar literary histories. Indeed, *American Renaissance* contains a series of portraits that had become stock by the 1880s: the wispy idealist (Emerson), the antisocial naturalist (Thoreau), and the sin-haunted moralist of the Puritan past (Hawthorne).

Yet on closer inspection, the Civil War plays a greater role in Matthiessen's account than it first appears. Hovering just offstage throughout most of the book, the war nevertheless provides an unacknowledged terminus or boundary marker for Matthiessen that provides him with retroactive coherence to the otherwise fractious and heterogeneous period of the 1850s. The war's spectral presence asserts itself in Matthiessen's periodization, for instance, in his sense that the war had permanently fractured literary history: "Following the Civil War," he writes, "... transcendentalism could no longer be thought dangerous."²⁴ It also asserts itself in Matthiessen's insistence on the complexity and internally divided nature of the works he examines – works he suggests contain and dramatize the social tensions and disjunctions that would propel the nation toward war. But the war is most palpably present in the critic's emphasis on tragedy as the single most important achievement of the era.

Matthiessen had reserved Whitman for the concluding section of *American Renaissance* to present a triumphant synthesis of Emersonian optimism and Melvillean tragedy. Yet it is Melville's "vision of evil" that inhabits the critical center of the work, shadowing and subsuming its tepid Whitmanian conclusion. *American Renaissance* provides one of the first extended and searching explorations of the significance of tragedy in American literature, elevating the mode to a preeminent position in a freshly articulated canon of taste. Read alongside the opening section on Emerson, Matthiessen's analysis of Melville redefines the American Scholar as "the hero of tragedy," a "man in action" perpetually "in conflict with other individuals in a definite social order." The critic's focus on tragedy subtly announces a shift in his values, away from authors with a commitment to democratic possibilities and toward those whose tragic art issued from the realization that such commitments were likely to be only partially fulfilled in a fallen world. Tragedy, "built on the experienced realization that man is radically imperfect," also "contain[ed] a recognition that man, pitiful as he may be in his finite weakness, is still capable of

apprehending perfection, and of becoming transfigured by that vision."²⁵ At the heart of this recognition, unacknowledged but vitally present, was the Civil War.

Matthiessen may have arrived at this conclusion by reading his own times into the past. The radicalization of Northern intellectuals in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act seemed to him historically analogous to the socialist fervor that swept through the literary class during the Great Depression of the 1930s. As he explained to a colleague at Harvard in 1937, "I cannot study with profit revolutions of the past unless my mind is closely in touch with revolutionary process in the present."²⁶ But the emphasis on tragedy also allowed Matthiessen to construct a narrative about the buoyant rise and tragic fall of a native idealism without alluding to the horrors of Civil War. It enabled him to posit a set of distinctly American ideas and commitments without extending them into the social realm or without interrogating their violent consequences. If the Civil War provided a historical endpoint that enabled Matthiessen to make sense of his antebellum authors, it also provided a cautionary tale about the risks of inserting the aesthetic into the political – a struggle Matthiessen himself enacted in trying to fuse his interest in literature with his Christian Socialism.

In this way, *American Renaissance* is not so different from the plethora of American literary histories that followed the treaty signing at Appomattox. The fear of a second secession or a renewal of sectional conflict ensured that literary historians would view the New England renaissance as either a rarified aesthetic and philosophical strain detached from the vagaries of history or conversely as a historical force involved in emancipatory movements that were strictly bounded by historical demarcations such as the "antebellum period." Matthiessen's work performed a similar function. By isolating his authors from a war that was in many ways the historical climax of their thoughts and writings, he contributed to a long-standing narrative that regarded antebellum literary culture as a quaintly outmoded movement subsumed by the increasing complexities of U.S. society.

American Renaissance would in turn inspire an entire generation of workers in the field of American studies whose studies similarly conclude just before the United States abruptly, if temporarily, ceased to exist after the firing on Fort Sumter. For these critics, sectional tensions demanded creative release and resulted in the prodigious outpouring of "classic" American writing that still deeply informs literary historiography. But this focus on antebellum writing ensured that the war period was overlooked. This tradition, initiated by Edmund Wilson's emphatic assertion in 1962

that “The period of the American Civil War was not one in which belles lettres flourished”²⁷ continued a decade later when Daniel Aaron reiterated this premise by claiming that the war had remained “unwritten.”

In other words, the kind of literary historiography initiated during war-time by Moncure Daniel Conway and continued with little deviation for the next 100 years has obscured as much as it has revealed. Literary historians before and after Matthiessen have ignored contiguities between ante- and postbellum writing, conveniently lumped writers into categories for which they are ill-fitted, and simplified the complicated relationships between literary and cultural action.²⁸ The periodization of American literary history as occurring either before or after the Civil War has ultimately blocked one of the more fascinating stories in that history: how American authors contributed to the hardening of attitudes that led to the Civil War and how the war in turn shaped and modified the deepest beliefs and convictions of those authors.

That a “New England Renaissance” should have come to prominence after the war should come as little surprise. War is invariably a conflict of narratives, a clash between opposing realities. When fighting ceases, the victor’s most valuable spoil is the right to promulgate an official version of the conflict’s meaning and outcome, its essential rightness and confirming teleology. Increasingly after the war, American literary historians ignored the socially engaged forms of Northern writing, especially its aspirations for a transformative moral order, and focused instead on the more aesthetic aspects of such writing. For well over 100 years, American literary history indulged in its own counterfactual exercise – only instead of imagining a Southern victory, it imagined no war at all.

Notes

- 1 F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. xi, ix.
- 2 Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, pp. xii, 179.
- 3 Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson: A Biography* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), p. 608.
- 4 David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), p. 2.
- 5 Mark S. Neely, *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
- 6 George William Curtis, “Editor’s Easy Chair,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 38 (Jan. 1869), 268.
- 7 Moncure Daniel Conway, “The Transcendentalists of Concord,” *Fraser’s Magazine* LXX (Aug. 1864), 245, 252.

- 8 "A Transcendental Mecca," *Littell's Living Age*, Robert S. Littell (ed.), (Boston: Littell, Son, and Company, 1864), vol. 83, pp. 178, 179.
- 9 See Fred Lewis Pattee, *The First Century of American Literature 1770–1870* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966), p. v.
- 10 Charles F. Richardson, *American Literature, 1607–1885*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1910), vol. 1, pp. 51, 42.
- 11 *American Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 427, 425, 22, 426.
- 12 Barrett Wendell, *A Literary History of America* (New York: Scribner's, 1900), pp. 495, 244, 245, 463, 467, 499.
- 13 Anonymous, "Mr. Emerson at Harvard," *Every Saturday: A Journal of Choice Reading* 4 (21 Sept. 1867), 380.
- 14 William Peterfield Trent and John Erskine, *Great American Writers* (New York: Henry Holt, 1912), pp. 126, 118.
- 15 Bliss Perry, *The American Spirit in Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1918), p. 125.
- 16 James T. Fields, quoted in Alice Fahs, *The Imagined War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 21.
- 17 Anonymous, "Thoreau's Maine Woods," *Atlantic Monthly* 14 (Sept. 1864), 386.
- 18 Anonymous, "The Genius of Hawthorne," *Atlantic Monthly* 22 (Sept. 1868), 359.
- 19 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Americanism in Literature," *Atlantic Monthly* 25 (Jan. 1870), 59.
- 20 Paul Elmer More, "The Solitude of Hawthorne," *Atlantic Monthly* (Nov. 1901), 588.
- 21 F.O. Matthiessen, papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, ZA MS.206.
- 22 Robert Spiller, "Emerson & Co.," *Saturday Review* (14 June 1941), 6.
- 23 Mathiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. vii.
- 24 Mathiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. 61, 9n.
- 25 Mathiessen, *American Renaissance*, pp. 179, 180.
- 26 Matthiessen Papers, letter to Kenneth Murdock, n.d., 1937.
- 27 Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. xi.
- 28 See Christopher Hager and Cody Marrs, "Against 1865: Reperiodizing the Nineteenth Century," *J19* 1 (Fall 2013), 259–284.

CHAPTER 5

The Realists' Civil War

Ian Finseth

The day after the Battle of Chancellorsville, a soldier on the losing side, William L. Aughinbaugh of the 5th Ohio Infantry, reflected on the spectacle of violence he had just survived:

To see the flashes of the muskets and the blaze of the artillery at each discharge, and watch the train of fire following the shells, when they were fired, and see the 'bombs bursting in air,' would have been a grand, a magnificent sight, could one have looked upon all this as he would at a play on a stage, without seeing behind the curtain, but when one saw the dead and dying around him, all feelings or thoughts of the beautiful left him (May 7, 1863)¹

What makes this passage remarkable – especially in the context of Aughinbaugh's growing disillusionment with the war effort – is not only the self-consciousness with which it both invokes and rejects the linkage of beauty and violence but also that it implicates, in its allusion to "The Star-Spangled Banner," one of the iconic texts of American cultural identity. In his own way, Aughinbaugh recognizes here the ways in which myth and aesthetics, those handmaidens of war, can derange both our perceptual and emotional responses to the real world around us. The soldier, predisposed to see the battle in romantic and nationalist terms, is finally liberated, conceptually, by the actual bloodshed he witnesses: bloodshed that measures the cost of his disenfranchisement.

In this one moment, in one man's private journal, we can discern some of the seeds of a complex literary history that would unfold in the late-nineteenth-century as American writers sought to come to terms with the meaning of the Civil War. Making generalizations about how they did so is a hazardous business – because many different strategies were brought to bear, from many different perspectives – but one of the signal impulses of the era was to move beyond the constrictions of Romance and to go, as Aughinbaugh puts it, "behind the curtain." This desire to get at

the “reality” of the war (however that reality was conceived) helped generate a distinctive strain of literary realism that took its place within a broad, evolving, many-faceted, and at times controversial artistic movement in the United States. American literary realism, which found guidance in the work of such European writers as Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, and Leo Tolstoy, would not come into its own until the 1880s and 1890s, a full generation after the war, and its subject matter reflected the full range of that era’s cultural problems and circumstances: immigration and urbanization, ethnic diversity and racial conflict, shifting conceptions of gender, socioeconomic stratification and class conflict, the geographic heterogeneity of an expanding republic.² But the roots of realism arguably can be traced to the 1850s, in antislavery and other reform literature dedicated to exposing the hard realities of life, and in this sense the Civil War accelerated and helped give shape to a process of literary development that was already underway.³

As Aughinbaugh’s journal entry suggests, we should look for the paradigmatic origins of Civil War realism in the brutal violence that was experienced by soldiers and, to a lesser extent, by civilians. For many observers, that violence represented the zone of human experience in which illusions and preconceptions, often derived from the broader culture, were tested in a fateful confrontation with the real. During the war itself, what arises in a variety of witness accounts – diaries, correspondence, memoirs – is a graphic anatomical realism aimed at capturing, with great fidelity of detail, the effects of combat on the human body. James Verity, another Union soldier from Ohio, for example, described being shot at the battle of Chickamauga: “I had went down at the fire from the rebs, having been struck by a minie ball on the nose mashing it flat, tearing the roof of my mouth, and breaking both jaws badly, on the right side of my face, my tongue was cut from some cause, and right eye badly damaged with the bone at the tear duct protruding.”⁴ Innumerable writings focused, unflinchingly, on the sights and smells of the dead. Describing the aftermath of the battle of Antietam in a letter to his wife, George Barr, a surgeon with the 64th New York Infantry, wrote: “[t]he dead were laying in piles unburied as black and bloated as they could be and producing the most noisome stench in the world.”⁵

Such experiences of violence, widespread beyond anyone’s expectation, found expression throughout late-nineteenth-century American literature, in the fiction of such major authors as Stephen Crane, John William De Forest, and Ambrose Bierce, and in the great variety of stories, poems, and essays about the war that appeared in periodicals such as *Harper’s* and the

Atlantic. To some extent, the literary class sought to “deromanticize” the war, challenging their culture’s pervasive ethic of martial heroism, which held that “aggressive action promised strength and psychic wholeness” and which thereby “turned organized violence into a regenerative rite.”⁶ Without a doubt, scenes of ghastly slaughter, as in Bierce’s “Chickamauga” or Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court*, were hard to square with a belief in the ennobling power of battle. Going “behind the curtain” in this sense meant revealing and making vivid the wounded bodies, blood-soaked fields, and sheer physical destruction that the Civil War entailed. If a characteristic impulse of literary realism is to bring the reader face to face with difficult truths – to report, as would a journalist or a photographer, the actual and observable facts of the world and the experiences of regular people – then the violence of the Civil War would seem to invite, even demand, such treatment, especially when memories of the war began fading in the 1880s and 1890s, and when a new and unsavory conflict, the Spanish-American War of 1898, loomed on the horizon.

“What like a bullet can undeceive!” wrote Melville in “Shiloh,” from *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866).⁷ Although enclosed by parentheses, this brief interjection – or more precisely, this abrupt rifle shot in an otherwise meditative poem – opens onto a rich literary history in which “undeception” was taken as the realist project and “deception” implicitly as its foe. Here, the deceptions of the “dying foemen” involve personal glory or national allegiance: “Fame or country,” as Melville limns it, rendering these motivations misdirected, illusory. But the poem gives primary agency and force to the undeceiver, not to the deceptions, and it is, crucially, an inanimate object that possesses that agency. The bullet, that is, stands in for the entire process, both historical and psychological, whereby industrialized violence strips away the illusions people bring to battle, particularly the notion – which *Battle-Pieces* meticulously deconstructs – that going off to war is a heroic, romantic enterprise. And what if we tinker with the punctuation of that line and read it as a question – “What like a bullet can undeceive?” – rather than as an exclamation? The implied answer, of both Melville and an emerging generation of writers who prided themselves on taking a clear-eyed view of reality, is that *words* can undeceive: that “honest” literature represents not only a bulwark against but also an assault on the obfuscations of political rhetoric, the mystifications of culture, and the supposed falsifications of life endemic to romantic sentimentalism.⁸ Thus, a number of the major realists imagined themselves as engaged in battle against a variety of post-bellum cultural formations: for example, political feminism (as in Henry

James's *The Bostonians*), finance capitalism (as in William Dean Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes* or *The Rise of Silas Lapham*), white supremacy (as in Albion Tourgée's *A Fool's Errand* or *Bricks without Straw*), the chivalric tradition (as in Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*). The actual Civil War may appear only secondarily or indirectly in any particular literary work, but its influence can be seen in patterns of symbolic displacement of combat away from the literal battlefield to the arena of literature, culture, and politics.

So not only would it be a misconstrual to think that Civil War realism began and ended with the depiction of violence but it would also be misleading to suggest that such realism necessarily took the war itself as its primary subject matter. The proper question is how the war provoked certain literary (and artistic) responses in which the problem of how to represent "reality" is foregrounded and in which that reality comprises the broader cultural, political, economic, and psychological changes that the war helped bring about. If the Civil War (among other historical forces) provided impetus and momentum for the development of American literary realism, how we can describe its aesthetic and ideological features? How was the war refracted through the particular narrative and stylistic formulations of realism? Such innocuous-sounding questions yield no easy answers, given the tremendous formal, ideological, and authorial diversity of realism, a diversity that resists ironclad claims about who the realists were, what they were up to, and what they accomplished. There are countless Civil War writings that deploy, in various ways and for various ends, the customary representational strategies of realism: attention to material detail, an emphasis on the relation between interiors and exteriors, a desire to document history in the making, an alertness to the intricacies of social existence. These methods for achieving what Roland Barthes called the "reality effect" characterize important works of memoir (Grant, Mary Chesnut, Federico Cavada, Samuel Watkins, Mattie Jackson); poetry (Dickinson, Whitman, Melville, Henry Timrod, Sarah Piatt, Sidney Lanier); fiction (Bierce, Rebecca Harding Davis, Hamlin Garland, S. Weir Mitchell, Stephen Crane); polemical commentary (Frederick Douglass, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Edward Pollard, Albion Tourgée); and of course the vast tide of writings, published and otherwise, by folks less well-known than these few parenthetical examples. To attempt a comprehensive account of how these works participate in something called "realism" is to guarantee failure. Instead, my approach here is to sketch out some of the recurring thematic brambles that American literature ran into as it came face to face with the war and its aftermath.

I begin with close readings of two novels that illustrate some of the central interpretive issues in Civil War realism and then move into a broader discussion of realism's heterogeneous epistemology and its transitional role in the emergence of American modernism.

It is symptomatic of the problems just adumbrated that the novel most commonly cited as the first full-length foray into Civil War realism – John William De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867) – employs certain crucial techniques for representing “realistically” the social aspects of a war-torn society, yet remains unable or unwilling to divest itself of the basic narrative arc and telltale shadings of romance.⁹ Or to be more charitable: De Forest thematizes the relationship between realism and romance and thus produces a fascinating transitional text wherein the political and the personal are shown to be entangled in an historical crisis born not only from increasingly complex economic, cultural, and military conflicts (the province of realism) but also from profoundly emotional struggles involving love, heroism, duty, and the loss of innocence (the province of romance). The story, in brief, tells of a wartime love triangle in federally occupied New Orleans, as the eponymous Lillie Ravenel (daughter of a fierce Unionist) is first wooed and won by the hypermasculine, morally compromised Colonel Carter and then, following Carter's death in battle, moves to the North with her father, where she falls in love with and marries the more patient and honorable Captain Colburne, who had been waiting in the wings all along. The convergence of national and marital union as the dual telos of the narrative seems to position *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* as an early “romance of reunion”¹⁰ although the novel also acknowledges the “limits of sentimental citizenship.”¹¹

Around the basic structure of its romantic plot, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* develops what might be called an overarching attitudinal realism that involves the thematization of various forms of disillusionment that attend both personal and national maturation. Not only do the characters themselves, through hard experience, become slowly or abruptly aware of the real workings of the real world (as Lillie learns of her first husband's infidelity) but also the novel seems eager to induct the reader into a fuller understanding of the realities of modern society. Thus, we find interwoven strands of moral realism (the sexually liberated Mrs. Larue, a “child . . . of Balzac's moral philosophy,”¹² goes narratively unpunished for her sins); political realism (Colonel Carter maneuvers elaborately for military advancement); and economic realism (the Colburne family's failed investments are the subject of detailed remark).

Yet *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*, in its treatment of war itself, remains committed to concepts of masculine sacrifice, renewal, and ultimate heroism, and what results is a strange amalgam of realism and romance. In realist mode, De Forest, in the comparatively few scenes of actual battle in the novel, seeks to evoke the confusion, brutality, mechanization, and moral ambiguity of modern war; at the siege of Port Hudson, "the uproar of heavy guns, bursting shells, falling trees and flying splinters was astonishing, stunning, horrible. . . . Grim faces turned in every direction with hasty stares of alarm."¹³ At the same time, the characters themselves seem conditioned to perceive war, and to narrate it, in terms of its heroic and aesthetic potential (in Aughinbaugh's term, its "magnificent" beauty). From the front, Captain Colburne writes letters "unflagging in their tone of elation, bragging of the bravery of his regiment, describing bayonet charges through whistling storms of hostile musketry, telling of captured flags and cannon by the half hundred." Lillie's father, reading one of these letters, expresses perfectly, if unwittingly, how the romantic and the realistic intermingle: it is "the most splendid battle-piece that ever was produced by any author, ancient or modern," and simultaneously, "[t]here is cause and effect, and their relations to each other, in his narrative." By the final pages, Colburne has not become a traditional military hero but something along the lines of a heroic realist, a figure of "chivalrous sentiment," yet one whose "responsibilities will take all dreaminess out of him, and make him practical, industrious, able to arrive at results."¹⁴ Even if "[w]ar in the long run is pretty much a matter of arithmetical calculation,"¹⁵ the novel redeems it as preparatory for some greater labor of culture. For Colburne's apotheosis as a heroic type – the "soldier citizen" who "can return to peaceful industry, as ennobling as his fighting" – is associated with American greatness: "Like the nation, he has developed, and learned his powers," and it "is in millions of such men that the strength of the Republic consists."¹⁶

So the romance of war survives in this otherwise realist novel in two crucial ways: first, as it is transmuted into a valorous history of culture building, and secondly, as it stands as the antithetical (and therefore indispensable) term against which realism defines itself and achieves its identity. For this reason, De Forest's novel prefigures, and helps account for, the tendency of much Civil War "realism" – from Whitman's *Memoranda during the War* to Loreta Janeta Velazquez's *The Woman in Battle* – to incorporate both the stylistic trappings and the narrative logic of romance.¹⁷ Insofar as the war was, indeed, about love, heroism, sacrifice, and adventure, the lessons of romance were adaptable to realism's purposes; insofar

as the war revealed the fictions by which people (mis)understood their experience, the lesson of realism was that literature could bring us closer to, not farther away from, the truth.

That was certainly the aim of Albion Tourgée in *A Fool's Errand* (1879), another novel in which the action is determined, at a profound causative level, by a war that is not the immediate subject matter of the narrative.¹⁸ The story follows the experience of Comfort Servosse, a Union colonel from Michigan who after the war relocates his family to the South, where he discovers that the crisis of 1861–1865, far from being decisively concluded, constituted “a mere incident of a great underlying struggle.” That struggle is between “two peoples,” “two nations,” “two civilizations,” and it takes the form of a reactionary and violent response on the part of the South to postwar Northern efforts to rebuild state governments, enfranchise African Americans, and generally re-form the Union on a Northern cultural model.¹⁹ The story, in other words, is about the failure of Reconstruction, and in its polemical analysis of that complex historical problem, *A Fool's Errand* has a lot of explanatory work to do. It expounds on the strategic shortsightedness of “the Wise Men” (i.e., Congressional Republicans); on the political methods of white supremacism; on the reactions of former slaves to the events unfolding around them; on the inadequacy or outright complicity of the national press; and on Southern culture's intolerance of dissent, its distrust of outsiders, and its fierce protectiveness of its traditions.

It is in this impulse to explain things that *A Fool's Errand* exemplifies a particular strain of postwar American realism, one that sought to reckon with the material, psychological, and social intricacies of contemporary life – in today's parlance, with the distinctive complexities of modernity. The conditions for the emergence of such realism (whether directly concerned with the Civil War or not) were organically connected to the war, insofar as the conflict accelerated the complexification of American society, both structurally and functionally, meaning that there were both more parts and more interaction among the parts, demographically, politically, and economically.²⁰ Yet rendering large-scale complexity in text (as Tourgée seeks to do), organizing a welter of historical and cultural strands of meaning into an intelligible and coherent form, could only be done by appropriating (transporting across textual lines for symbolic purposes) the idiosyncratic experience of actual individuals and populations. It is a paradox of literary pixellation: the more comprehensive the narrative, the broader the sweep of reality that it seeks to encompass, the more it needs to rely on simple governing concepts, character types, shorthand tropes,

and other techniques for making sense of unruly masses of detail. The line between explaining and obfuscating, or between particularizing and allegorizing, turns out not to be so brightly drawn.

For instance, if Tourgée's protagonist and surrogate, Colonel Servosse, is correct in asserting that "[r]eal motives are rarely formulated," then one of the tasks of realism, à la Henry James, is to uncover those motives, to go beneath the surface of rhetoric, self-deception, and conscious articulation to excavate some real and determining psychological substrate. Yet in its analysis of Reconstruction, and particularly in its treatment of the mentalité of the Southern *Volk*, what *A Fool's Errand* discovers, or rather asserts, is that there is a spiritual, almost mystical, character to a people, and an essential simplicity at the heart of social complexity. Thus, Tourgée renders the North-South conflict in terms of social types ("The fruitage of slavery has been the ignorant freedman, the ignorant poor-white man, and the arrogant master") and via moral abstractions that verge on the allegorical: "So a part of the re-united country was in light, and the other part in darkness, and between the two was a zone of bloody graves."²¹

While the novel, therefore, represents a milestone in American fiction's engagement with the complexities of the postwar era, it remains invested in the romantic myth of Southerners as "grand and kingly people," a "race of warlike instincts and regal pride," who embody a "chivalric spirit." The postwar North, Tourgée argues, is at a disadvantage against the force of Southern unity and moral conviction, a disadvantage that will only end "[w]hen the North learns to consider facts, and not to sentimentalize" – in other words, when realism prevails. Yet the Fool himself, Comfort Servosse, is a man of "common sense," a realist, who understands that "to know is to observe, to understand, and to delineate," and the novel nonetheless represents him, in death, as a figure of failure, whose "ideas wa'n't calkulated for this meridian." The inescapable conclusion is that realism has failed, outgunned by the romantic fictions of the South and the political theories of the North. Even Servosse's death, which by the logic of the narrative should amount to a sacrifice, gives rise neither to a resolution of the love plot nor to more than sentimental reconciliation among former antagonists. Rather, what his death symbolically enables is the self-creation of Tourgée as an author, liberated through a kind of surrogate suicide and now free to acknowledge that the most realistic realism will acknowledge the claims of romance: its value and force as a psychological and cultural phenomenon.²²

Tourgée argued as much in his later essay, "The South as a Field for Fiction" (1888), writing that "[t]he downfall of empire is always the epoch

of romance" and predicting that the "almost unparalleled richness of Southern life" and its tragic historical experience would make the region "the Hesperides Garden of American literature." In the process, he indicts a particular kind of realism on the basis of its superficiality: "The 'realists' profess to be truth-tellers, but are in fact the worst of falsifiers, since they tell only the weakest and meanest part of the grand truth which makes up the continued story of every life." Significantly, the grounds of criticism here are that the "realists," despite their close attention to detail, have not really put their finger on the "grand truth." This is essentially the same distinction that Whitman, in *Memoranda During the War*, makes between "technical histories of some things, statistics, official reports, and so on" and "histories of the *real* things," and it reappears, in various habiliments, throughout Civil War literature.²³

The challenge of discerning the "grand truth" and representing "*real* things" refers us to broader epistemological and formal problems that are centrally at issue in realism. Realism, I have suggested, should be seen as a dynamic, flexible mode of representation, essentially independent of form and promiscuously employed in the service of a diversity of aesthetic, affective, and ideological purposes. But more than merely a set of rhetorical gestures or a method of literary self-differentiation, it also reflected a genuine desire to reckon with actual, material transformations in the nineteenth-century world. Against the backdrop of an array of technological, economic, and social changes, from urbanization to conspicuous consumption to the renegotiation of gender roles, American realism embraced what Thomas B. Connery terms a "paradigm of actuality" in which the focus is on "people, events, and details that are verifiable and based on observation and experience" and which amounts to "a genuine *cultural* paradigm and not simply a literary proclivity." As a mode of confrontation with history, the subtleties of social existence, and the often brutal intrusion of extraordinary events, like war, into ordinary lives, realism was driven by a sense that the real was not only apprehensible but urgently so, given the increasing mediation of experience itself. Of course, this did not resolve but rather generated the basic epistemological problem of realism: How can we really know the world that is to be represented?²⁴

In the great variety of late-century writings that dealt directly with the Civil War, from soldiers' memoirs and historical essays to popular fiction and high-brow poetry, we find different modes of treating the intertwined problems of knowledge and signification, ranging from a kind of epistemological naiveté at one end of the spectrum to a sharp skepticism at the other. In the former instance, truth is knowable and borne by the sign;

human consciousness can discover and represent an intelligible world. In the latter, the world is not so easily known, and what the sign bears may simply be meaning, or multiple meanings, or no meanings, rather than truth, which Stephen Crane compared to "A breath, a wind, / A shadow, a phantom."²⁵ Along with Crane, the era's more skeptical authors realized that objectivity of description was neither possible nor always desirable and that conveying the deeper psychological and cultural meanings of war required representational strategies sensitive to the ways in which subjectivity could distort the real. Therein lies much of the literariness of Civil War realism, which can be measured against superficially objective accounts of battle that appeared in numerous popular histories, including, for example, Benson Lossing's *Pictorial History of the Civil War*, John William Draper's *History of the American Civil War*, and *Century* magazine's *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* series of the 1880s. In aspiring merely to present a "faithful chronicle" or a "truthful record" of the war, such historical accounts lacked one of the defining features of their literary counterparts: an effort to textually capture not only "the real," such as the look of a wound or the progress of a battle, but also the ways in which consciousness itself – perception, emotion, fantasy, memory – determined how the reality of war would be lived, indeed created, in the first place.²⁶

That effort underlay a startling variety of approaches to representing the "truths" of the Civil War and its long aftermath. Many texts, as I have suggested, followed a more or less Howellsian realism, with closely observed details of everyday life, naturalness of speech and conversation, a sensitivity to the rhythms and subtleties of human experience, and a sympathy for the humble and the common – qualities Howells himself comprehended under the famous dictum that realism's proper subject was "nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material."²⁷ Representative examples would include Henry James's "The Story of a Year" (1865), Edward Bellamy's "An Echo of Antietam" (1889), Hamlin Garland's "The Return of a Private" (1891), and Harold Frederic's "The War Widow" (1894). At the same time, we find accounts that display a less earnest, even casual relationship to factuality. Sarah Emma Edmonds's *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* (1865), for all its vivid descriptions of army life, liberally embellishes Edmonds's adventures as she dons a series of costumes and personae in aid of the Northern cause; the memoir, writes Elizabeth Young, amounts to "a form of textual counterfeit."²⁸ What Huck Finn would call "stretchers" are even more flamboyantly on evidence in Loreta Janeta Velazquez's *The Woman in Battle* (1876), a veritable farrago of improbabilities, the authenticity of which has been in question almost

since the moment of its publication, notwithstanding the author's assurance that the narrative is written in "as plain, straightforward, and unpretending a style as I could command."²⁹

In African American literature, realism – in the broad sense of "undeception" that I have been describing – possessed unique ethical and social urgency and had long oriented itself toward combating the myths (sentimental or otherwise) regarding blackness in Western culture. During both the Civil War and the postbellum era, autobiography remained the dominant genre of African American letters, and the narratives that addressed the war specifically – notably those by Susie King Taylor, James Lindsay Smith, Mattie Jackson, Elizabeth Keckley, and Frederick Douglass – represented a collective effort to represent how the "truths" of the war impinged on, and ultimately transformed, black experience. In African American poetry, fiction, and essays, the question of race was ever present, and the realist imperative of such texts – from George Moses Horton's *Naked Genius* (1865) to Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892) and W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) – involved a direct assault on the pernicious fictions of race and, more subtly, an effort to show how racial experience is shaped by myth, discourse, and symbol. Challenging what Charles W. Mills has termed an "epistemology of ignorance," or a broad cultural history whereby "[e]vasion and self-deception [had] become the epistemic norm," African American realism sought to liberate white Americans' perceptions of race and of black experience(s), perceptions that were still being distorted, for instance, by plantation fiction and the romance of the Old South. Especially during the violent backlash in the 1880s and 1890s against black political and economic gains, the Civil War provided an emancipationist reference point that African American writers could invoke not only to affirm their own rights as members of the national polity but also to reaffirm the war's importance as a historical moment when untruths forcibly yielded to the higher truth of racial justice.³⁰

Around the turn of the century, the complex epistemology of Civil War realism took critical strides forward in the fiction of Stephen Crane and Ambrose Bierce, both of whom were profoundly concerned with the ways in which the structures of human subjectivity determine the lived experience of war, our memories of it, and our very ability to communicate it. Both writers also gravitated toward the absurd, the coincidental, the randomness – that is, toward the strangeness of reality, its tendency to fall short of, surpass, or defeat our expectations. In *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), most famously, Crane employs an impressionistic realism that enables him to convey the fog of war as experienced by an individual soldier and,

more probingly, to undercut Henry Fleming's supposed "coming of age" by revealing it to be a process of interiorizing one cultural mythos (the martial realist) in place of another (the romantically aspiring hero). In his other Civil War fiction as well, particularly the stories collected in *The Little Regiment* (1896), Crane construes the real not as some stable ontological domain only awaiting an adequacy of representation, but as a loose agglomeration of odd moments and details whose meaning is uncertain, contextual, and individual. Bierce, who was never quite able to move beyond his traumatic experience in the war, took a similar view, but more than Crane did, he savored the irrational and inexplicable responses of the human being in extremis, responses that merely reflected the irrationality and inexplicability of the world itself. Despite his conscientious attention to the physical specificities of the Civil War,³¹ in canonical stories such as "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and in less well-known stories such as "A Tough Tussle" or "A Horseman in the Sky," Bierce developed a kind of phenomenological surrealism that stressed the experiential alienation, perceptual derangement, and frightening defamiliarization that could afflict anyone caught in the grip of war.

In this necessarily brief discussion of Crane and Bierce, we are brushing up against certain signal features of literary modernism, which obviously cannot be discussed at any length here but which also emerged in reaction to a culturally transformative spectacle of mass death, World War I. Modernism no more "supplanted" or "succeeded" realism than realism did romanticism, and like any literary "movement," it consisted of dynamic processes of sedimentation and upheaval, fission and fusion, and all the constitutive idiosyncrasies of its practitioners and fellow travelers. Yet in taking this longer view of literary history, we can appreciate how realism, in its increasingly complex, critical attitude toward the nature of "truth" and the subjective constitution of reality, was pointing its head, so to speak, toward modernity. The American Civil War was not the central historical driver in this development, which involved deep shifts in intellectual, philosophical, and religious culture, but the conflict contributed its own momentum, insofar as it provoked a crisis of meaning and representation that no amount of rhetoric or blithe assertion could resolve. In its violent reconfiguration of American society and in its incalculable impact on individual people, the Civil War opened up bitter disputes not simply over political matters but over basic facts, interpretation, and historical truth. National reconstruction, then, proceeded, at one level, as an attempt to repair "the communicative and deliberative procedures of the republic," in James Dawes's words,³² and at a metaphysical level, as

an attempt to recuperate a shared understanding of the very world that Americans inhabited. As a literary movement – or, I have argued, as a multifarious mode of representing the relationship between people and the real world around them – realism evolved within this broader cultural and epistemological context, when the moorings of knowledge as well as the moorings of society seemed to have been shaken. It could not resolve any of this, could not put the world back together again, but Civil War realism remains a vitally illuminating record of the central ways in which humanity has tried, with varying success, to come to terms with the undeniability of violence.

Notes

- 1 Aughinbaugh, William L. Unpublished private journal, 1862–1863. The Clements Library, University of Michigan.
- 2 The modern critical appraisal of realism, which might be dated to the late 1980s and early 1990s, has emphasized its complex cultural politics as realists responded to rapid historical change while navigating a pressurized literary marketplace. See Michael Davitt Bell, *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). More recent studies have illustrated how fruitful the field remains and pointed out new avenues of inquiry; see, for example, Jennifer C. Cook, *Machine and Metaphor: The Ethics of Language in American Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Judith Fetterley, and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Barbara Hochman, *Getting at the Author: Reimagining Books and Reading in the Age of American Realism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Molly Crumpton Winter, *American Narratives: Multiethnic Writing in the Age of Realism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Henry B. Wonham, *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 3 Christopher Hager and Cody Marrs have argued that we should regard the Civil War not as a profound fracture in American literary history but as “a nexus of open-ended, irregular transitions in nineteenth-century literary history,” transitions that involved “coeval mixtures, piebald genealogies, promiscuous exchanges, and uncanny retrievals and durations.” Hager and Marrs, “Against 1865: Reperiodizing the Nineteenth Century,” *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 1.2 (Fall 2013), 261, 266.
- 4 James Verity, Unpublished private journals, 1861–1895, (14 Oct. 1863), Clements Library, University of Michigan.

- 5 George W. Barr, Papers, 1855–1865, (21 Sept. 1862), Clements Library, University of Michigan.
- 6 Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), pp. 29, 21.
- 7 Herman Melville, “Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War,” *Published Poems: Battle-Pieces, John Marr, Timoleon*, Robert C. Ryan, Harrison Hayford, Alma MacDougall Reising, and G. Thomas Tanselle (eds.) (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 2009).
- 8 This point recalls Bell’s influential argument that realism, more than a coherent “movement,” was, in effect, an effort to assert the masculinity of writing rather than fighting. More recently, Barrish and Morgan have offered important complications of this picture, showing that the relation between gender and power in realism moves in unpredictable ways. See Phillip Barrish, *American Literary Realism, Critical Theory, and Intellectual Prestige, 1880–1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); William M. Morgan, *Questionable Charity: Gender, Humanitarianism, and Complicity in U.S. Literary Realism* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2004).
- 9 John W. De Forest, *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*, Gary Scharnhorst (ed.) (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).
- 10 Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
- 11 Martin T. Buinicki, “John W. De Forest’s *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* and the Limits of Sentimental Citizenship,” *American Literary Realism* 39.1 (Fall 2006), 48–63.
- 12 De Forest, *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, p. 371.
- 13 De Forest, *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, p. 250.
- 14 De Forest, *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, pp. 424–425, 468.
- 15 De Forest, *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, p. 24.
- 16 De Forest, *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, p. 468.
- 17 Walt Whitman, *Memoranda during the War*, Peter Coviello (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Loreta J. Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle: The Civil War Narrative of Loreta Velazquez, Cuban Woman and Confederate Soldier* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).
- 18 Albion Tourgée, *A Fool’s Errand*, John Hope Franklin (ed.) (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961).
- 19 Tourgée, *A Fool’s Errand*, pp. 379, 104, 137, 381.
- 20 This point draws on Bergendorff and Godfrey-Smith. See Steen Bergendorff, *Simple Lives, Cultural Complexity: Rethinking Culture in Terms of Complexity Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Complexity and the Function of Mind in Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 21 Tourgée, *A Fool’s Errand*, pp. 380, 387, 130.
- 22 Tourgée, *A Fool’s Errand*, pp. 253, 323, 255, 383, 64, 344, 404.
- 23 Albion Tourgée, “The South as a Field for Fiction” (1888), *Undaunted Radical: The Selected Writings and Speeches of Albion W. Tourgée*, Mark Elliott

- and John David Smith (eds.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), pp. 210, 205, 211, 209, 22.
- 24 Thomas B. Connery, *Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), pp. 14–15.
 - 25 Stephen Crane, *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (Boston: Copeland and Day, 1896), no. 28.
 - 26 Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial History of the Civil War*, 3 vols. (Hartford, CT: T. Belknap, 1866–68), vol. 1, p. 3; John William Draper, *History of the American Civil War*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1867–1870); Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Being for the Most Part Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers: Based upon "The Century war series"* (New York: The Century Company, 1884–1887).
 - 27 William Dean Howells, *"Criticism and Fiction" and Other Essays*, Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolf Kirk (eds.) (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 38.
 - 28 Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 152.
 - 29 Velazquez, *Woman in Battle*, p. 6.
 - 30 Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 18, 97.
 - 31 See David M. Owens, *The Devil's Topographer: Ambrose Bierce and the American War Story* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).
 - 32 James Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War through World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 4.

PART II

Genres

Dépôt Culture: The Civil War and Periodical Fiction

Kathleen Diffley

Because the quickening circulation of nineteenth-century periodicals owed much to the wartime spread of railroads, the delivery practices they enabled might have given the Civil War's first stories a head of steam and thus a new narrative urgency. Amid the upheaval and opportunity of civil crisis, writers of the 1860s and 1870s could well have seen in the railroad's iron path and thundering power something of Lincoln's stern purpose in proclaiming emancipation or Grant's tenacity in approaching Richmond. Long associated with gathering speed, the railroad might seem a visible sign of the Northern zeal that would soon claim the postwar territories to the west and a ruined South hungry for capital. Just as importantly, a developing rail network encouraged the widening markets, swift dissemination, and keen demand for literary magazines in which the experience of civil cataclysm was first imaginatively distilled. Between the fall of Fort Sumter in 1861 and the Centennial celebrations in 1876, railroad lines helped engineer both the invasion of troops and the spread of periodicals, so it should come as no surprise if railroads took their place in early Civil War stories with all the impact of *Harper's Weeklies* and *Atlantic Monthlies* thrown from passing mail cars.

But among hundreds of short war fictions that appeared in magazines of the South and West as well as the culturally dominant Northeast, railroads actually figured much less often as hurtling machines in the garden than as accessible public lobbies – that is, as platforms, stations, and dépôts. Instead of standing in for imperial ascendancy or iron grip, such spaces suggest a deliberate pause, the unexpected hallmark of the war's first fictive traces in print. Seeking these early commemorative gestures ever since 1973, when Daniel Aaron declared the Civil War “unwritten,” literary scholars have lately been investigating periodicals in record numbers, as the work of Christopher Hager, Elizabeth Young, Alice Fahs, Linda Frost, and Coleman Hutchison has demonstrated.¹ The fortunate result has been that less predictable fiction and poetry, drama and autobiography,

illustrations and memorials have rendered the war's parlored women less polite, its soldier scribes less disengaged, its photographic operators less silent, and its freed voices less fleeting than Aaron once believed them. Taken together, the competing pages of periodicals have increasingly rivaled Civil War photographs in revealing what Anthony Lee has called "the disruptive, disjointed, and retrospective experience of war,"² whose most fertile commemorations John Bodnar has dubbed "multivocal." A growing sense of contention has only accelerated with recent archival decisions about when and what to digitize, decisions that recall Bodnar's declaration in *Remaking America* that backward glances are always at odds. "The shaping of a past worthy of public commemoration in the present is contested," he writes, "and involves a struggle for supremacy between advocates of various political ideas and sentiments."³ These days, the once scant traces of an "unwritten war" have been amply supplemented by multiplying versions of civil trauma and, with them, by what David Blight has called "the politics of memory,"⁴ a phrase that suggests both the varieties of immediate recollection and the dividends of strategic forgetting.

All the more reason to look closely at a range of nineteenth-century periodicals and the variegated fare that originally gave shape to the experience of civil crisis, narratives that reveal the several key developments this essay will examine. Most significantly, the accelerating publication of short war fiction beginning in 1861 and often appearing in newly founded magazines quickly gravitated toward three narrative modes: Old Homestead stories, Romances, and Adventures, with differing commemorative liens. In addition, the wide circulation of Northern periodicals like New York's *Harper's Weekly* provoked counter-publishing across the continent and especially in the South, where defiant magazines in Charlotte and Baltimore bound local stories to national challenges that only began with secession and the Confederacy. Finally, periodicals from innovative Western metropolises like Chicago and San Francisco championed more unusual casts in more unsettling locales that demonstrated emancipation's unforeseen social complexities. At a time when the war's shifting fortunes or Reconstruction's unstable policies were sometimes difficult to track across multiple theaters of engagement, periodical fiction offered an edgy coherence to wartime trauma and its immediate, if uncertain, aftermath.

Given such a large geographical canvas and a period of acute social change stretching to the nation's centennial in 1876, an apt metaphor may be welcome. Of particular moment in understanding the practices of nineteenth-century periodicals, as well as the modes of Civil War storytelling, is the outsized railroad terminus undertaken by Cornelius Vanderbilt



Figure 6.1. "Grand Central Dépôt, New York."

Constructed at 42nd Street to serve the New York Central and Hudson River, the Harlem, and the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad Lines.

Harper's Weekly (3 February 1872): 104. Wood engraving.

in postwar New York. Begun in November 1869 and completed in October 1871, Grand Central Dépôt (Figure 6.1) simultaneously assembled a growing network of lines and reoriented local traffic, specifically from 42nd Street to 48th Street.⁵ Built of red pressed brick with cast iron trim painted white to look like marble, the passenger head-house pictured here in its ornate detail was constructed in French Second Empire style and was, with its spectacular train shed and radiating tracks, "immense," according to *Harper's Weekly*.⁶ A ready instance of Gilded Age ambitions and the rise of a newly monied business class with time to read, Vanderbilt's imposing dépôt also suggests the proliferation of magazines and magazine stories during the 1860s and 1870s, as well as the amalgamating master narrative of liberty and justice that was circulated by the Republican North.

Because the U.S. Post Office had just begun free home delivery in 1863 and then only to major cities nationwide, Grand Central Dépôt can further stand in for the modest railway stations across the country, where periodicals arrived in bulk and where the considerable bulk of *Harper's Weekly* (1857–1916) often mattered most. Declaring itself "A Journal of Civilization" on the masthead of its outsized pages, New York's principal

illustrated newsmagazine generally circulated to more than 100,000 war-time subscribers despite interrupted mail to the South, and then to 160,000 by 1872, as Frank Luther Mott has noted.⁷ During the Civil War and Reconstruction, when the august *Atlantic Monthly* (1857–present) saw subscriptions decline markedly from a high of 50,000,⁸ *Harper's Weekly* was passed secondhand and read aloud often enough to carry its support for Lincoln and the Union to millions.

In its folio pages, more than 100 stories of the war appeared between 1861 and 1876, far more than in any other periodical and more than enough to establish the three discernible modes that wartime narratives tended to assume. Like Grand Central Dépôt, such stories were nationally attuned and yet locally complex, at once stately head-house and yet open to traffic. The pedestrians, carriages, and omnibuses in Figure 6.1 are actually fitting analogues to the narrative particulars of spot, site, and locale in any of the newsmagazine's Civil War stories and especially to the fairly predictable traffic of Old Homestead stories, which promised continuity, sanctuary, and ultimately the restoration of an antebellum domestic order. During the war and then Reconstruction, such stories in *Harper's Weekly* were comparatively few in number, but they helped shore up a Revolutionary legacy when it was most in doubt. They stumbled, however, over the new social relations that emancipation introduced and the Thirteenth Amendment sustained in abolishing slavery. Instead of social revolution, Old Homestead narratives offered war's antidote in family and its abiding protections on a national scale. So a Massachusetts lighthouse keeper in "Old Tybee" stands by his Georgia beacon as he has for forty years, despite a hot-headed Southern assault; a "rat a tat" boy in "The Drummer of the Illinois Twenty – th" finds his lost father in the Blue Ridge; and a plea for a hungry New York seamstress in "Santa Claus's Wish Council" indicts a Dutch merchant, an army contractor who is thriving while patriotic households starve. As St. Nicholas himself inveighs, "... for Christ's sake don't make me drive to your chimneys past so many that know no fire, no dinner, and where there must be empty stockings where there are any at all." Casting wartime attacks, separations, and losses as household invasions, *Harper's Weekly* published twelve Old Homestead stories after 1860 and then none after 1864, although a few hybrid variations appeared during 1865 and the troubled years that followed.⁹

Much more numerous were the Romances that also began appearing in 1861 and then soared to some fifty-one stories in *Harper's Weekly* by 1876, plus fourteen hybrid narratives that incorporated the home's conservative reassurances and another twelve that anticipated the adventure of

uncharted social life far from familiar practices. On periodical pages as on dépôt platforms, where almost anyone could be cheek by jowl, Romances were the narrative cum national vehicles for reconstructing households, where change was cast as desirable and simple. During 1861, it made romantic sense to recall the spirit of '76 that Old Tybee also cherished, particularly after the early battle of Bull Run when a Newport lieutenant finds himself "Wounded" before returning to the Rhode Island girl he loves.¹⁰ It was also common for Northern heroines to become nurses, teachers, and fundraisers after the enlistment of their men. But where Old Tybee never deserts his Georgia post, Southern girls in the weekly's more romantic stories conveniently deserted Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana out of fierce loyalty to good Union men, some of whom hated slavery. Meanwhile, the drummer boy from the banks of the Mississippi morphed into a love-struck Iowa chaplain in "Ellen Ellery" or a Wisconsin volunteer whose father pines for the nurse who saves his boy in "Margaret's Cross."¹¹ For them and so many fictive others, love prevails as the reward for wartime service, leading one couple after another as well as the newsmagazine's attentive readers to the new homesteads that briskly absorb loss as reconstruction begins.

But the hungry New York seamstress whose homestead remains neglected until Christmas Eve was worth recalling when Romances wobbled, sometimes fatally. St. Nicholas does not intercede for the octo-roon nurse of "The Deserter," the Massachusetts teacher in the borderland Kentucky of "The Yellow Jasmine," or a Southern spy who chooses duty over love in "Miss Nilson's Gaiter-Boots." Sometimes love, or at least loved ones, did not survive, particularly when lovers were not (for many readers) the folks next door. Only in the weekly's late hybrid stories, for example, did the adventure of emancipation bring romance to a Georgia quadroom in "The Devil's Frying Pan" or to the mulatto slaves passing for the masters they resemble in "My Boy Ben." Only during the final year of the war, in other words, could *Harper's Weekly* imagine rewarding slave hearts for the ready service of slave hands.¹²

Less ubiquitous but also less tidy by contrast, Adventures in *Harper's Weekly* increased to twenty by December 1866, and they made those newly acknowledged black hands even more active. Away from home and preoccupied with regiments instead of romance, adventure stories often relied on a white cast to restage widely reported battles – for instance, at Cedar Mountain and Antietam in 1862, Brandy Station and Gettysburg in 1863, and Spotsylvania and the Wilderness in 1864. But the military account in "Buried Alive" recalls Fort Pillow in April 1864 and the massacre of

black Union troops, whose story is told by a former Alabama slave. As loyal as a Georgia lighthouse keeper but now to a new “colored” regiment in Tennessee, this mulatto soldier survives the assault of Nathan Bedford Forrest’s Confederate “rough-riders” only to be tossed with other black volunteers and white enlistees into a loose grave. “I thought I could feel the worms gnawing at my flesh,” he writes. The embodiment of a new racial order at least in death, this battlefield grave momentarily holds a black Tybee claiming recognition, now as a public servant after decades as private property.¹³

Similarly, the black drummer of “Little Starlight” recalls an earlier drummer in the Blue Ridge, but now as a male Topsy hungry for freedom instead of a father. Unlike Romances and Old Homestead stories, Adventures guaranteed reinvention rather than relocation or continuity. Particularly after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on 1 January 1863, the service of African Americans, in and out of the army, got noticed in the stories that *Harper’s Weekly* told about the Civil War, even when the service was makeshift and the dialogue was slight. For the escaping Union prisoners of “In the ‘Libey’” (20 February 1864), it is not Santa Claus but willing slaves who lend a hand to “Linkum men,” just as they do in “Out of Bondage” and “Two Days with Mosby.” Like the radiating tracks of Vanderbilt’s dépôt, initially hidden by the upscale headhouse and the train shed’s crowded platforms, the adventures of black heroes amid a newsmagazine’s diversifying casts began to multiply.¹⁴

For that reason, it is also significant that Vanderbilt’s several railroads were no more fully integrated behind their headhouse façade than the North, the South, and the West were fully integrated in the new nation that emerged from civil war. In a surprisingly diplomatic fashion, Vanderbilt made sure that each rail line had its own ticket, baggage, and waiting rooms constructed so discretely that through passengers had to exit the building and come back in – the reason why Grand Central Dépôt had thirty-one doors. Just as Vanderbilt’s terminus housed several lines that were served separately, so newly founded periodicals in post-war metropolises like New York, Charlotte, Baltimore, Chicago, and San Francisco were all dépôt pavilions of a sort, venues that would become enterprising and distinct spaces for “multivocal” recollections. Indeed, new periodicals in the South and West assembled what Michael Warner has called “counterpublics,” which assailed the newsmagazine’s emerging focus on liberty and justice as insistently as newsprint Davids assailed a Goliath with subscribers. “Counterpublics,” writes Warner, “are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will



Figure 6.2. "Waiting for the Train."

"The Boat and the Train." *Harper's Weekly* (17 July 1858): 452. Wood engraving.

be transformative, not replicative merely."¹⁵ Much like New York's monumental dépôt, the national script that *Harper's Weekly* honed was full of thresholds and open to local traffic, particularly as "the South" reentered a national lexicon and emancipation engendered a new nation that the country's founders had scarcely anticipated.

With an eye to periodicals themselves as local "platforms" across the country, it is worth pausing on how the newsmagazine once imagined "Waiting for the Train," which provided a revealing glimpse (Figure 6.2) of dépôt culture. On the cusp of war, the Harper art department caught even a small station's heterogeneous "company" and their inevitable maneuvers around the REFRESHMENTS stall and the LADIES ROOM, as well as their accumulating goods and a disputatious baggage master alert to resistance. Indeed, the crowded station platform offers not only a witty glimpse of *Harper's Weekly*, in the aging hands of a top-hatted reader on the right, but also a resourceful model for understanding Civil War literature through a periodical lens. During the late 1850s, the platform traffic *Harper's Weekly* pictured suggests at once a portrait of magazine readers,

a cross section of disruptive characters, the babble of multivocal recollections, and the agendas of disputatious magazines animating memory's politics. Such a crowded platform anticipated both commemoration's dynamics from story to story and Bodnar's "struggle for supremacy" as periodical venues proliferated, a struggle that the wide circulation of *Harper's Weekly* did much to fuel.¹⁶

In Charlotte's *The Land We Love* (1866–1869), for instance, the Confederacy was never deserted by footloose heroines because their hearts always inclined close to home, where older family relations prevailed. Against Northern social welter, the South emerged as a lingering patriarchy identified not with newly diversifying urban economies (and *dépôt* platforms) but with a rural and landed society where the American Revolution was a recent memory. There, plantation order favored a republicanism that Peter Bardaglio sees deriving from coverture and the domestic dependency of women, children, and slaves, a dependency that for Stephanie McCurry ties the definition of white Southern manhood to a precarious Confederate clout. It is thus fitting that the magazine's eight Civil War stories are often Old Homestead narratives that banish the Union's Old Tybees and reckon instead with Yankee invasion, domestic turmoil, and sudden refugees. In its fictive casts, the magazine also tended to homogenize rather than diversify. That social conservatism often swept away almost every platform dawdler in Figure 6.2 except the old woman on the left and perhaps a growing child in greater disarray. With a subscription list that peaked at 12,000 in some thirty-two states,¹⁷ *The Land We Love* would never upset the commemorative appeal and exceptional reach of *Harper's Weekly*; however, its editorial pages in "The Haversack" regularly countered the "spiteful, revengeful, remorseless" liberties of the antislavery North, even in fiction's quick images.¹⁸ From a daughter's gown on the snow to the pearl handles of dessert knives, from the walls of a family cottage to the tombstones of a family graveyard, the homes and ghosts of *The Land We Love* were inevitably and insistently white.

A case in point is Ina M. Porter's "Road-Side Story," where a dilapidated blacksmith's family in northern Mississippi loses husband, daughter, and daughter's husband. Even son Davy returns home to Corinth mentally shattered after the horrific battle of Shiloh, as though the war's damage were figured in this homestead's continuing diminishments. When the cottage is set on fire by escaping Alabama slaves and the ailing white family is thrown out in the snow, the tale of their shriveled household disparages "black savages," a far cry from the enterprising black drummer boy or the enlisted black soldiers in *Harper's Weekly*. And yet "Road-Side Story"

insinuates a marked social reorganization, specifically in its narrative frame. As the blacksmith's widow relates her tale in a small country dépôt, she quietly transforms a record of woeful loss into a chronicle of unforeseen vitality. Almost offstage, the dépôt setting substantiates the widow's newly mobile household order, her newly urgent voice, and her newly discovered and attentive "sister" traveling east. With that handsome lady's blessing, Old South privilege joins New South endeavor as a Mississippi refugee manages what a New York seamstress does not: self-sufficiency in a war-torn world of women without men. Scorning "Lost Cause" tears, the widow carries her bundles into the reception room and opens her "emaciated pocket-book" for its "sewing material," the sign of a well-crafted tale on the way and a feminized Southern social order on the make.¹⁹

Similarly defiant in its allegiances, Baltimore's *Southern Magazine* (1868–1875) also contested New York's version of commemorative priorities, often when raising an editorial fist against the "centralism and consolidation" that *Harper's Weekly* (and Cornelius Vanderbilt) sought to bolster. Systematically contrary, in part because wartime Baltimore had been occupied by Federal troops, the city's chief postwar venue claimed to be "the largest and best Literary Journal of the South,"²⁰ one that fought to preserve the heritage of Robert E. Lee and P.G.T. Beauregard by becoming the vehicle of the Southern Historical Society. Aiming to vindicate a Confederate past, the *Southern Magazine's* seventeen Civil War stories were never studies of domestic despair but almost always adventures of escape: reciting episodes from the chronicle of Confederate defeat meant exploring the territory under federal surveillance for avenues of resistance and artful dodging. Stories like Caroline Marsdale's "Cousin Jack," which follows a Confederate scout through the bayou country north and west of New Orleans, are quick and resolute, creating elbow room for versions of platform men and women who are unencumbered.²¹ Curiously, what they are most often trying to escape is a white house – a Northern prison on the Great Lakes, Beauregard's headquarters in a shelled Petersburg, a roadside Louisiana hotel infested with bedbugs. That is, the homestead *The Land We Love* repeatedly celebrated, the *Southern Magazine* repeatedly eluded.

Arguably, the recurring white house was a surreptitious reminder of the president's home in the Federal capital and thus the embodiment of a dictatorial North. Refusing "Yankeeisation" in the magazine's editorial pages then jibed with "running like the mischief from about forty million Yankees" in "Cousin Jack."²² But the White House in Washington did not officially assume that name until 1902, as William Seale has pointed out;²³

Abraham Lincoln was generally said to live in the “Executive Mansion” or sometimes “the People’s House,” as Jean Baker has observed.²⁴ So it is worth noticing what Patricia Yeager discovers about storytelling practices in “Narrating Space,” her introduction to *The Geography of Identity*. “The physical world,” Yeager writes, “is also a site where unrequited desires, bizarre ideologies, and hidden proclivities are encrypted, so that any narration of space must confront the dilemma of geographic enigmas head on, including the enigma of what gets forgotten, or hidden, or lost in the comforts of ordinary space.”²⁵ For Yeager, stories are haunted by what they seek to repress, by an “encrypted” trace of social fear. So, Miss Calline’s manor with its “bright windows” at night promises a Confederate scout sanctuary while hiding a Union sympathizer’s betrayal. But if “Cousin Jack” is a ghost story, it seems less haunted by Louisiana’s Union loyalists than by Miss Calline’s upcountry mansion and planter past. The economic drag of a slave labor system was rarely supported in the industrializing *Southern Magazine*, and the white house can therefore suggest the patriarchal surveillance that was abandoned by almost every one of these seventeen Civil War protagonists. Part Romance and Old Homestead story as well as a wartime Adventure for a displaced New Orleans family, “Cousin Jack” never leaves “the South” as footloose characters in *Harper’s Weekly* did. But Marsdale’s story never leaves the homebound South of *The Land We Love* intact.

Nowhere in such counter-narratives was there a glimpse of slaves free to enlist or fugitives free to marry, any more than *Harper’s Weekly* imagined black passengers among the assorted “company” on dépôt platforms. But there was a whisper of African American presence when “Waiting for the Train” appeared on the same page with “Going on Board” (Figure 6.3), a more urban nod to the complications of nineteenth-century travel. Where the train dépôt appears jam-packed with passengers and that “exasperating personage,” the baggage-master, the steamship platform crowds most of the well-heeled passengers into the fainter mid-distance and foregrounds instead the human apparatus of travel: the porters, haulers, and fruit sellers, as well as (above them) the drivers, footmen, and deckhands who represent the city hotels, coach owners, luggage manufacturers, line magnates, and even periodical editors who made travel work. Surveying this scene, *Harper’s Weekly* recalls “the throng, the noise, the reckless manner in which luggage is handled, the excitement about lost trunks, good berths, and misplaced keys, the . . . *ensemble* which travelers do not readily forget.” For a wittily self-conscious newsmagazine, dépôt culture could invite such intersections, the veritable mirror space in which multiplying interests converged.²⁶

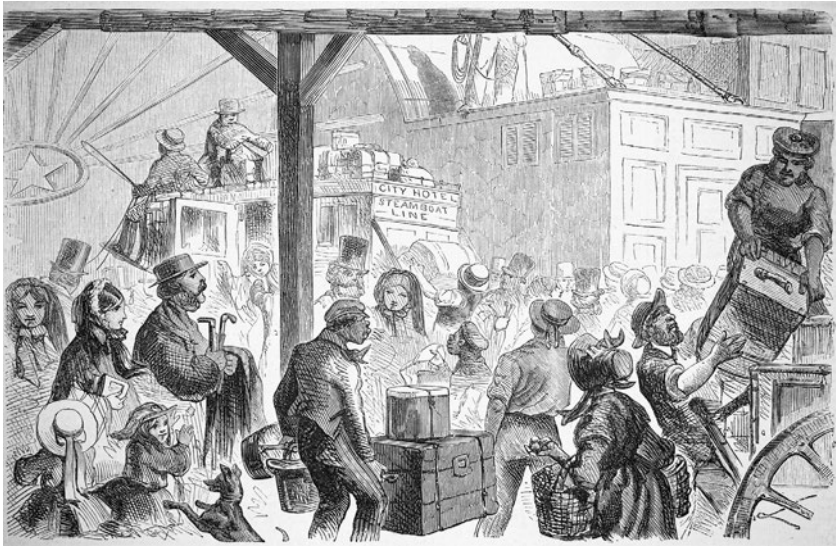


Figure 6.3. "Going on Board."
 "The Boat and the Train." *Harper's Weekly* (17 July 1858): 452. Wood engraving.

That was particularly true in a magazine like Chicago's *Lakeside Monthly* (1869–1874), which insisted from its initial editorial "To Western Writers" that "the go-aheaditiveness of the Western people will be demonstrated in literary as well as commercial matters."²⁷ By Michael Hackenberg's count, the self-styled "Great Magazine of the Interior" would reach some 14,000 subscribers by 1873 with essays about the "sable singers," the settlement of the Old Northwest, labor organizations, Indiana lakes and Minnesota summers, Nevada silver mines and California geysers.²⁸ Its twelve Civil War stories might also incorporate the railroads that made Chicago matter. But these narrative ventures carried a sharper sense of steamship jostle in their busy construction, which relied in nearly every instance on flashbacks from multiple sources and characters oddly met – like an Ohio farmer and a soldier's sister, a Northern colonel on an Illinois train and the Virginia hostess he recalls, a Nashville hospital inspector who stumbles on the Natchez Indians, even a Priest and Priestess of the Sun. Foregrounding such unusual encounters, as *Harper's Weekly* foregrounded a whiskered paterfamilias and two muscular porters or a laden fruit seller and two playful girls, the *Lakeside Monthly* favored peculiar wartime "ensembles." These were exceptionally varied and could include an Indian brave or a

mulatto cook, almost always in hybrid war stories that joined Romance's new household to Old Homestead continuity or Adventurous discovery. Rarely were the trimmer stories of *Harper's Weekly* so kaleidoscopic; never were the wartime recollections of Southern magazines so racially diverse.

In fact, the narrative complications of a burgeoning black cast and Bodnar's "struggle for supremacy" orient Helen E. Harrington's "In the Palmy Days of Slaveholding," the tale of a slave master that falters and a slave marriage that succeeds.²⁹ Unusually double-plotted and character rich, Harrington's story features a series of antebellum women that its youthful Puritan narrator might eventually resemble: the New England aunt who marries an intemperate slaveholder, the resident belle who quietly enables abolition, and the slave mother who refuses to leave her husband despite a master's cruelty. Their fates amount to their visitor's choices, after she lumps "black servants" with a wealth of Southern exotica like roses, jasmines, and oranges. But this backstory of slavery's demise is, finally, less about a black woman's resistance than a white girl's tutorial; as Toni Morrison has observed, "the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive . . . a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly consciousness."³⁰ While Harrington's New England narrator becomes an abolitionist, she nonetheless tries on different roles, and she recognizes the troubling grace of plantation manners that foster both "patriarchal kindness" and "tyrannical oppression."³¹ The narrative measure of that tension arises when her Faulknerian picture of a planter's hopeless battlefield charge gets set against a less familiar scene of a black boy stealing sugar. Curiously, the "shining crystals" stick to his face like white fear, the inverted image (as Morrison and Yeager might declare) of the whip marks on his mother's neck and thus of stolen black labor. In the *Lakeside Monthly*, the tug of abolition barely masks a Northern complicity in genteel Southern society, as well as the shared dependency of white women and black slaves. Indeed, slaveholding's complex interactions in Harrington's story are caught in her title, where "palmy" suggests both flourishing plantation beauty and the slap of a hand, both honorable poise and ready violence.

Just as Western and entangled, San Francisco's *Overland Monthly* (1868–1875) actually conceived its title as a nod to Eastern journey and Western difference, thanks in large measure to the transcontinental railroad. The magazine demonstrated its inspiration on each issue's title page, where an iconic grizzly bear put a paw on the tracks. That is one reason why immediate subscriptions claimed 2,500 issues each month, as Stephen Mexal has noted, although nationwide circulation did not hit 12,000 until

the magazine's "unique regional aesthetic" was revived during the 1880s.³² Restless in spirit, especially on its editorial pages, the *Overland Monthly* essentially traded the well-defined foreground of "Going on Board" for its sketchier midfield welter, which approximated the midcentury demographic shifts of California's Golden Gate. As Glenna Matthews has put it, "San Francisco was not born enlightened – far from it – but it was born in such a way that many groups could contend in its public sphere."³³ So they did in the magazine's ten Civil War stories, which were surprisingly unpredictable in imagining emancipation's opportunities. Here and there, military adventuring in regional backwaters actually produced "Linkum men" who were black and even Lincoln women with unsuspected thumbs on a national scale.

Both prove crucial in Josephine Clifford's "An Episode of 'Fort Desolation'," a story in which the white officers and three-year volunteers of the 125th United States Colored Troops are posted to the New Mexico Territory during 1866.³⁴ Unlike tales of homecoming in the East, this "episode" stages Reconstruction's emerging politics as a series of contrasts. The first of these concerns one fort's postmistress and her fondness for display, suggested by a China toilet set, which is at odds with her less delicate insistence on playacting at the expense of her "servants." In addition, the black characters she torments return her treatment with a covert defiance, one that joins a sergeant's muscular resourcefulness to the fitful vision of a black "family" that is sorely beset. Finally, the unnerving physical resemblance between the postmistress and her narrating visitor abbreviates the distance between playacting and play watching, with unsettling implications for Clifford's readers in comfortable armchairs. Where *Harper's Weekly* favored willing black enlistment and the *Lakeside Monthly* steeped abolition in complicity, the *Overland Monthly* staged African American challenge in a sergeant's dark eyes, a cook's moral disdain, and a boy's frustrated tears as emancipation came into focus. It is as though this sergeant were "buried alive" by his regiment, this cook were betrayed by Santa Claus, and this boy were tricked by his newfound mother, his newfound freedom, and his newfound counterpublic.

If the task of a Goliath like *Harper's Weekly* was to summon a public for reconstructing liberty and reconceiving justice, especially in the wake of emancipation, then the commensurate function of more fugitive Davids was to distill the experience of war for those who disputed the history of the victors. Bodnar would argue that their "contest" is inherently "multivocal," as periodicals of the 1860s and 1870s confirm. Significantly, even Grand Central Dépôt did not offer a unified façade to travelers who



Figure 6.4. Grand Central Dépôt train shed from 45th Street and Lexington Avenue. From Stereo view. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

approached the station headed west. They saw instead the train shed's massive north façade, an outsized rear wall reaching up to 112 feet and providing access to the twelve tracks and seven platforms that made the dépôt's train shed the largest interior space in the country,³⁵ while cows on the other side of the tracks (Figure 6.4) foraged nearby. In its visual retort to head-house ornament, in the clean lines preferred by innovating engineers over the baroque clutter favored by historicizing architects, even in the bovine counter of Lexington Avenue to the upscale appurtenances just a few blocks away, Vanderbilt's back entrance makes palpable the postwar regional resistance to Northeastern cultural hegemony. Further, this back-side view bespeaks the less familiar commemorative work that regional periodical platforms and their diversifying tracks enabled.

The Civil War's immediate social upshot, plotted hundreds of times in newly founded magazines, was often negotiated in such a "multivocal" and disputatious space, even among new magazine readers. Positioned as never before to help create a new national imaginary, periodicals offered

crowded platforms where many hands first directed public commemoration and first asked whose liberty and justice was worth preserving. Their agendas were as various as those guiding more recent digital projects, which have now made all of these nineteenth-century venues freely accessible somewhere in cyberspace on virtual platforms of their own. More than simply filling a gap in American literary history, periodicals of the 1860s and 1870s help unveil memory's politics with an agenda-driven question – cui bono? – as something like thirty-one doors once again swing open.

Notes

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- 2 Anthony W. Lee, "The Image of War," *On Alexander Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 9.
- 3 John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 16, 13.
- 4 David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 4.
- 5 "Grand Central Dépôt," *Harper's Weekly* (3 Feb. 1872), 104–105, 108–109.
- 6 "Grand Central Dépôt," 108.
- 7 Frank Luther Mott, "Harper's Weekly," *A History of American Magazines*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938–1968), vol. 2, pp. 475–476.
- 8 Ellery Sedgwick, *A History of the Atlantic Monthly, 1857–1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 109–110.
- 9 "Old Tybee," *Harper's Weekly* (28 Dec. 1861), 830–831; "The Drummer of the Illinois Twenty – th," *Harper's Weekly* (6 Sept. 1862), 566–567; "Santa Claus's Wish Council," *Harper's Weekly* (24 Dec. 1864), 823.
- 10 "Wounded," *Harper's Weekly* (21 Dec. 1861), 814–815.

- 11 "Ellen Ellery," *Harper's Weekly* (23 Feb. 1867), 121–122; "Margaret's Cross," *Harper's Weekly* (17 Oct. 1863), 662–663.
- 12 "The Deserter," *Harper's Weekly* (14 June 1862), 378; "The Yellow Jasmine," *Harper's Weekly* (13 Sept. 1862), 586–587; "Miss Nilson's Gaiter-Boots," *Harper's Weekly* (16 Jan. 1864), 42–43; "The Devil's Frying Pan," *Harper's Weekly* (7 May 1864), 294–295; "My Boy Ben," *Harper's Weekly* (29 October 1864), 695.
- 13 "Buried Alive," *Harper's Weekly* (7 May 1864), 302.
- 14 "Little Starlight," *Harper's Weekly* (29 Oct. 1864), 702; "In the 'Libey,'" *Harper's Weekly* (20 Feb. 1864), 122–123; "Out of Bondage," *Harper's Weekly* (14 Jan. 1865), 30; "Two Days with Mosby," *Harper's Weekly* (21 Jan. 1865), 43.
- 15 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Press, 2002), p. 122.
- 16 "The Boat and the Train," *Harper's Weekly* (17 July 1858), 452–453.
- 17 Ray M. Atchison, "The Land We Love: A Southern Post-Bellum Magazine of Agriculture, Literature, and Military History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 37 (October 1960), p. 508.
- 18 "The Haversack," *The Land We Love* (March 1867), 367.
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- 23 William Seale, "The White House: Plans Realized and Unrealized," *Our Changing White House*, Wendell Garrett (ed.) (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), p. 1.
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- 33 Glenna Matthews, "Forging a Cosmopolitan Civic Culture: The Regional Identity of San Francisco and Northern California," *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity*, David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner (eds.) (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), p. 219.
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CHAPTER 7

Imitation and Resistance in Civil War Poetry and Song

Faith Barrett

Sometime around the midpoint of the nineteenth century, a freeborn African American man living in Ohio, penned alternate words for a popular nationalist anthem:

My country, 'tis of thee,
Dark land of Slavery,
 In thee we groan.
Long have our chains been worn –
Long has our grief been borne –
Our flesh has long been torn,
 E'en from our bones.¹

Although from an impoverished background, Joshua McCarter Simpson had managed to work his way through four years at Oberlin. Thereafter he worked as an herb doctor and a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Moving in the abolitionist circles of the Western Reserve, Simpson began to write and perform alternate versions of well-known anthems and popular songs, folding satire and critique into these antislavery writings.² In his “Song of the Alien American,” Simpson underlines that for enslaved African Americans the phrase “My Country” is fraught with painful contradictions. While Samuel Francis Smith’s original lyrics for “America” foreground a singular “I” in the first and second verses, Simpson moves to a collective “we” of suffering blacks already in his first verse. Moreover, by replacing “liberty” from the original with “slavery” in his revision, Simpson underlines that the experience of collective national feeling that is the birthright of every white American is denied to blacks, whether free or enslaved. By writing new lyrics for “America,” Simpson underlines the exclusion of African Americans from the ideals of freedom on which the nation was founded. Drawing rhetorical power from his readers’ and listeners’ knowledge of the anthem “America,” Simpson critiques the nation’s hypocrisy; the well-known tune brings dignity and moral authority to the abolitionist arguments Simpson presents.

This cultural practice of rewriting source texts for new political purposes lies at the heart of Civil War-era poetry, as writers from a wide variety of backgrounds talk back to songs, poetry, journalism, and other discourses in their work.³ Dialogic responses make this body of work particularly exciting for scholars, upending our expectations about “high” and “low” literary forms.⁴ When Edmund Wilson influentially dismisses the poetry of the Civil War as “versified journalism,” he misreads the cultural position of poetry in this era.⁵ Wilson laments that there is far too much “declamatory versification of public events” and far too little of “the more personal kind of self-expression,” the kind that “was likely to take on an unconventional form.”⁶ Yet the opposition that Wilson sees between nationalist declamation and writerly introspection, between conventional aesthetic commitments and aesthetic innovation, is not one that readers of the Civil War era would have recognized. Rather, the innovative thematic and aesthetic commitments that we celebrate in the work of canonical poets such as Whitman and Dickinson are in fact *representative* of the poetry of this era. The poetry of the Civil War is thus far more varied in its political and aesthetic leanings than Edmund Wilson would have us believe. As this essay will go on to argue, a richly productive tension between imitation and innovation fuels the creative energies of a wide range of poets and song writers across the Civil War era.

Writing at the height of the Cold War and under the influence of New Criticism, Wilson overlooks the cultural centrality of poetry in nineteenth-century America, and he also fails to understand the extraordinary versatility of poetry at this historical moment. Integral to school-room pedagogy, poetry was read and recited in classrooms throughout the nineteenth century and was featured at school exhibitions and celebrations. Published in both newspapers and magazines, poetry also circulated in the form of broadsides and pamphlets. Moreover, political and cultural events in the United States prominently featured poetry. A listener who attended a lecture on abolition, temperance, or transcendentalism could expect to hear poetry recited as part of the evening’s events. Poetry was also routinely read at celebrations for departing and returning soldiers and at memorials for the dead. In the camps, soldiers read poetry in their leisure hours and sang marching songs, sentimental ballads, comic parodies, and patriotic anthems. In the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, Americans encountered poetry on an almost daily basis. Not surprisingly, many also tried their hand at writing poetry, penning a Valentine for a sweetheart or an elegy for a fallen soldier. The strong tradition of imitation in poetry of this period no doubt played a shaping role in making poetry a genre that

seemed approachable not only to published writers but also to those who wrote only for their family and friends.

Strengthening poetry's cultural standing still further, new developments in printing and transportation technologies led to explosive growth in the number of magazines and newspapers and the numbers of their subscribers. As printing became cheaper and faster, publishers brought out new periodicals to appeal to a growing middle class. Because poems could be written quickly and copyright law did not yet exist, poetry was particularly well placed to benefit from the growth of periodical culture. With the expansion of the railway network, publications could reach new and distant audiences more quickly. In the North, this growth in periodical circulation continued during the war years, although Southern publications were ultimately limited by shortages of the raw materials needed for printing as the war progressed.

As the example of Joshua McCarter Simpson's "Song of the Alien American" makes clear, the poetry of this period was also strongly shaped by its hand-in-glove relationship with popular song. Simpson's piece underlines the widespread practice of writing and singing protest songs in abolitionist and other reform circles. Moreover, in the 1850s, a growing middle class had acquired pianos and organs in record numbers, and during the war years, publishers rushed to print sheet music for a dazzling variety of newly written popular songs as well as familiar favorites. While poets sometimes composed alternate lyrics for well-known tunes, as Simpson does, song writers also set popular poems to music, with the result that a single poem might circulate both as sheet music and as a poetic text. Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" first appeared on the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1862, but within a few weeks it was circulating in sheet music form as well and had become a popular favorite with Union troops. As this description of circulation practices makes clear, poetry was a genre that could be written and distributed quickly from region to region; it was therefore also a genre that was well suited to respond to developments on battlefields, in Washington, and in Richmond. During the Civil War, then, Americans on both sides of the conflict believed that poetry would play a crucial role in defining the new nations of the Confederacy, the Union, and – in the war's aftermath – the United States.

The Civil War prompted an extraordinary outpouring of poetry by men and women from all walks of life, as Americans sought to define their relationships to family, community, and nation, all constructs that were destabilized by the war. People turned to poetry in particular because

of the extraordinary rhetorical versatility of this genre, the possibilities it offered for testing out different voices and allegiances, for imitating literary conventions all the while offering innovative new approaches to thematic content. This essay will consider representative examples of four categories from this body of work: nationalist anthems, parodic rewritings of songs about soldiers, poems that consider the pleasures or glories of combat, and poems lamenting the war's losses. I will argue that these pieces strategically balance imitation of tradition with innovation, often using conservative literary forms for radical political purposes, mixing "literary" and "popular" forms, and sometimes pushing back against the popular discourses of sentiment. Nationalist rhetoric and sentimental stances often work in tandem in these pieces, but whereas conventional wisdom would suggest that sentimental rhetoric should dominate popular poems, this essay will suggest that many poems – both popular and literary – rely on understatement and skepticism as central strategies. The nationalist and sentimental discourses of the war are thus fraught with contradictions and indelibly shaped by poems and songs that resist the authority of these ideologies.

The best-known Northern anthem of the Civil War, Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," is a representative instance of the creative tension between imitation and innovation.⁷ On a visit to Washington DC in November 1861, Howe toured the Union camps with a group of friends, one of whom urged her to write better words for the marching song "John Brown's Body," which they had heard soldiers singing. Waking before dawn in the Willard Hotel the next morning, Howe scrawled out the verses to her "Battle Hymn" in one sitting. The song begins:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword
His truth is marching on. (WH, 75)

While Joshua McCarter Simpson layers his more radical antislavery message onto the broadly appealing patriotism of "America," Howe's rewriting of "John Brown's Body" removes both the gallows humor of the soldiers' marching song and its central image of "mould'ring" bodies; she thus resituates the poem's pro-Union arguments on a loftier, more literary plane.⁸ At the same time, however, she also all but elides the abolitionist commitments of the marching song. Howe's song builds to a triumphant first person plural just at the moment when it first introduces the concept of "freedom": "As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free"

(WH, 75). Yet in 1862, many white soldiers, both Northern and Southern, believed they were fighting for “freedom” – including the “freedom” earned through the American Revolution and also the “freedom” of states’ rights. Howe thus writes a Union anthem that will appeal to a broad constituency of Northern listeners and readers, a broader constituency than would support a more explicitly abolitionist message. Howe’s lyrics unify the North not through shared opposition to slavery but rather through shared support for the Union. Although Howe’s larger body of work from the war era shows that she was deeply conflicted about the unified patriotic “we” of her “Battle Hymn,” the success of this song established her reputation as a writer of national importance.

Moreover, whereas this poem clearly functions as a nationalist anthem for the Union cause, it also implicitly registers Howe’s struggle – as a middle class white woman – to find a meaningful way to participate in the war effort. Howe pursued her writing career against the wishes of her husband, Samuel Gridley Howe, who was active in many progressive political causes. Julia Howe’s struggle to continue her work as a writer registers in the poem’s strategic deployment of the first person speaker. In the poem’s first verse, the solitary speaker has a prophetic vision of the second coming: “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord” (WH, 75). By writing new words for the popular soldier’s song, Howe layers her own solitary female voice onto the voices of Union soldiers she had heard singing in the streets and the voice of John Brown himself, gaining rhetorical power and authority from this layering technique. Howe’s “Battle Hymn” thus not only records the founding of a collective of Union supporters but also documents her struggle as a woman writer to use her poetry as a form of activism.

Like Northern writers, Southern writers also relied on the technique of revising popular songs to articulate the future of their nation. During the war years, Dan Emmett’s “I Wish I Was in Dixie’s Land” circulated in multiple alternate versions among Confederate soldiers. Born in Ohio, the Irish American Emmett had written his song for the minstrel stage in New York City in 1859. With its catchy upbeat tune and its racist stereotyped image of a black speaker who looks back with longing toward the Southern home he has left behind, Emmett’s song was an instant hit, delighting white audiences both North and South and allowing both Northerners and Southerners to ignore the growing sectional tension. After the outbreak of hostilities, however, Southern writers scrambled to write loftier, more overtly nationalist lyrics for Emmett’s popular tune, frequently removing the black dialect that had helped ensure its success

on the minstrel stage.⁹ Among the most widely circulated of these alternate versions was Albert Pike's:

Southrons, hear your country call you
Up! lest worse than death befall you
To arms! to arms! to arms! in Dixie!
Lo! all the beacon fires are lighted,
Lo! all the hearts now be united!
To arms! to arms! to arms! in Dixie!¹⁰

While Emmett's lyrics had urged white Northerners and Southerners to look back nostalgically to the pleasures of Southern life ("I wish I was in de land ob cotton"), Pike's lyrics called white Southern men and women to immediate military action, to defense of the home fires.¹¹ Whereas Emmett's chorus defused the threat of black violence by using a first person speaker and a dialect-scrambled verb tense ("In Dixie Land, I'll took my stand,/ To lib an die in Dixie"), Pike's chorus uses standard white English to forge the powerful collective "we" of the Confederacy: "For Dixie's land we'll take our stand,/And live or die for Dixie!" Pike thus reiterates the popular minstrel tune, yet layers powerful nationalist beliefs onto the song's nostalgia for a lost Southern homeland. Poems and songs like Pike's effectively helped found the Confederacy.

Whereas Southern anthems often figured the South as an imperiled homeland, Northern writers positioned Lincoln as the patriarch whose wisdom could both build the Union Army and reunite the divided nation. In "Three Hundred Thousand More," James Sloan Gibbons responds to Lincoln's call, in July 1862, for 300,000 additional men to enlist in the Union Army by envisioning soldiers springing up from varied regional American landscapes, "from Mississippi's winding stream and from New England's shore" (WH, 92). Each stanza closes with the ringing refrain, "We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more." Underlining the speed with which poems could be written and circulated and the roles they could play in Washington and Richmond, Gibbons wrote the poem and published it in the *Evening Post* in July 1862. By autumn, more than one songwriter had set it to music, and in December, Gibbons sang the poem to Lincoln at the White House after the battle of Fredericksburg. While stanza 3 likens the waves of enlisting soldiers to the harvest growing in American fields, the fourth and final stanza argues that these new recruits must offer their lives to honor the sacrifice of their brothers who have fallen before them on the field of battle: "You have called us, and we're coming, by Richmond's bloody tide/To lay us down, for Freedom's sake, our brother's bones beside" (WH, 93).

If Gibbons poem represents a high-water mark of reverence for Lincoln and patriotic fervor, an altogether different tone is represented by the parody of Gibbons's piece written and performed in New York by Tony Pastor. In the summer of 1863, Lincoln signed the Conscription Act, which offered wealthy men the option of paying \$300 for a substitute in lieu of joining the Union Army. Pastor's parody already proclaims its satiric edge in its revision of Gibbons's title, "We Are Coming, Father Abraham, Three Hundred Dollars More." Punning on the double meaning of "clover" – money or the green plant – Pastor revises Gibbons's image of young able-bodied men springing up from a fertile American landscape:

We are coming, Father Abraham,
 Three hundred dollars more
 We're rich enough to stay at home
 Let them go out that's poor.
 But, Uncle Abe, we're not afraid
 To stay behind in clover
 We'll nobly fight, defend the right
 When this cruel war is over!¹²

The stanza offers a collective "we" of wealthy men, defending their right to rest at home, hiding in their "clover." Parodying multiple popular songs, a frequent technique for performers in musical reviews, this stanza also folds in a quick reference to the sentimental song "When This Cruel War Is Over." Although the original version of that song features a speaker who addresses her beloved with longing while he is far away on a battlefield, Pastor here has the wealthy men who prefer not to fight longing for an end to the "cruel war." Pastor relies on his listeners' abilities to catch and decode his many satiric revisions of clips from popular sentimental songs.

As this collaging technique suggests, the sentimental discourses of the war cannot be accurately read in isolation from their satiric counterparts. One of the most popular songs of the Civil War era, George F. Root's "Just Before the Battle, Mother," offers the prototype of the sentimental soldier boy, who thinks of his mother with love and devotion on the eve of battle with his like-minded comrades gathered around him:

Just before the battle, Mother,
 I'm thinking most of you;
 While upon the field we're watching,
 With the enemy in view.
 Comrades brave are round me lying,
 Fill'd with thoughts of home and God;
 For well they know that on the morrow,
 Some will sleep beneath the sod.¹³

Root's speaker thus embodies both the soldier boy's love for his mother – a feeling that was much celebrated during the war years – and a staunch patriotism that leads him to face death without fear. By contrast, Eugene Johnston's parody of Root's song, "The Skedaddling Song," foregrounds the cowardice and drunkenness of the poem's speaker:

Just before the battle, mother,
I was drinking mountain dew,
But when I saw the Rebels marching,
Unto the rear I quickly flew;
Where all the stragglers were flying,
Thinking of their homes or wives –
It was not the "Rebs" they feared, dear mother,
But their own dear precious lives.¹⁴

To read the teary-eyed sentimentalism of the first song in isolation from the biting wit of its parody is to misread Americans' understanding of the bond between mother and boy soldier in this era: readers and listeners embraced both sentimental and parodic pieces. In terms of the cultural work they accomplish, each kind of song sustains and supports the other, with parodies acting as a pressure release valve for the intense emotion of the sentimental songs and the sentimental pieces tempering the wit of the parodies with the contrast of deep feeling. Whereas Root's song suggests a causal connection between mother-love and patriotic heroism, in Johnston's parody, those soldiers who think of loved ones at home are the same ones who avoid combat at all costs.

Mocking the era's cultural obsession with the mother, Eugene Johnston writes a song entitled "Mother on the Brain," also sometimes called "The Mother of All Songs," that is a mash-up of clipped words and phrases from many different mother-focused songs:

Just before the battle, Mother, I was thinking most of you
Be quiet do, I'll call my mother (for an old Irish stew)
Mother dear would comfort me if she were here
I'm lonely since my mother died (from drinking lager bier).¹⁵

In the jumble of language and feelings that this mash-up expresses, the soldier speaker seems half deranged. The song's refrain goes so far as to suggest that this intense fixation on mothers is a malady: "I've got mother on the brain." As these examples make clear, in reading song revisions and popular songs of the Civil War era – both sincere and parodic – it is essential to reconstruct the discursive context to which each writer responds to understand how each writer shapes the tone of his or her piece to echo or talk back to the tones of its antecedents.

In nationalist anthems and songs for soldiers, dialogic responses to popular songs would perhaps be an expected creative method. In the Civil War era, however, it is not only “popular” writers who respond to popular forms, and indeed the opposition between “literary” and “popular” forms that twenty-first-century readers might expect does not hold true in this body of work. Thus, even poets we now recognize as canonical and “literary” reflect a knowledge of popular forms in their pieces. A case in point is the Civil War poetry of Emily Dickinson, which responds to popular song, popular poetry, and journalism, among other contemporary media. Whereas mid-twentieth century scholars saw Dickinson as a poet whose work turned inward, away from historical and political events, recent approaches to her poems have emphasized both her extraordinary productivity during the war years and the intensity of her response to the war. Some two dozen Dickinson poems take martial imagery and themes as central concerns, and many more include references to weapons and combat.¹⁶ In her widely anthologized “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –,” for example, Dickinson makes a gun her speaker, describing the complex bonds of affection and loyalty that unite the “gun” to its “Owner.” In the 1980’s, feminist scholars tended to read the poem as representing the mixture of love and frustration a woman feels when she marries, a union in which her sense of self is obliterated, replaced by the intensity of this affectionate bond. Read at a critical moment for feminist scholarship, this female-authored piece with a gun speaker who describes the thrill of the hunt and the pleasures of shooting seemed like a revolutionary declaration of women’s rights. The imagery seemed arresting, thoroughly original, an utterly distinctive vision. Yet if we resituate the poem in the context of the poetry of the war years, it quickly becomes clear that Dickinson is also responding to the Civil War and that she is working in this piece with a common trope from popular writing, that of the talking weapon.

On 4 July 1863, *Harper’s Weekly* published an anonymous 17-stanza poem titled “The Gun.” The poem offers a first person account of a scene of combat from the perspective of an artillery piece. Like Dickinson’s “My life had stood – a Loaded Gun –,” the *Harper’s Weekly* piece emphasizes the exhilaration of combat and the intimacy that develops between comrades in arms. Stanza 3 makes the adrenalin of combat explicit:

Ho! I am the conquering gun,
 Iron son of fire and noise;
 Through my frame already run
 Thrills obscure of coming joys.

Reading the two poems side by side, the force of Dickinson's innovation is readily apparent: her text is a marvel of rhetorical compression and riddling ambiguity, so that the *Harper's Weekly* poem appears both talky and somewhat stiff by contrast. Yet reading the two poems side by side also foregrounds the strangeness and eccentricity of the poem by Dickinson's anonymous contemporary, emphasizing again the extraordinary aesthetic and thematic range of poetry in this era.

In "My life had stood – a Loaded Gun –," Dickinson describes how a young man's decision to join the military can give him a new sense of identity, a new purpose in life, one so urgent that it might shatter his previous sense of self:

My life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day
The Owner passed – identified –
And carried Me away –¹⁷

Reading daily newspaper reports about events on battlefields and still mourning the death of Frazar Stearns, a close friend of the Dickinson family, who died at age 22 at the battle of Newbern, North Carolina, Dickinson would likely have seen the memorial volume Stearns's father assembled to honor his son. The letters included in the volume from Stearns's early months in the military are flooded with the young man's joy and exhilaration at serving with comrades and a commanding officer whom he trusted and loved. Dickinson's poem evokes the joy of young men thrilling to the hunt, relishing the power and the sound of their rifles. Like "The Gun," Dickinson's poem carefully sidesteps the problem of having a human speaker express pleasure in killing other human beings. Such feelings are not taboo for a weapon speaker, however:

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods –
And now We hunt the Doe –
And every time I speak for Him –
The Mountains straight reply –

The phrase "Sovereign Woods" underlines the ways that an army could claim contested territory after a successful advance. In addition to the sound of rifle fire, the poem also evokes the deep booming of artillery, the great gun's ability to set a hillside on fire:

And do I smile, such cordial light
Opon the Valley glow –
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had lets it's pleasure through –

Dickinson, here, recognizes the “Vesuvian face” of war: its commingling of beauty and terror, the life-threatening approach to the sublime.

Having represented the intense joy that accompanies destruction, the poem closes on a quieter, more intimate note, shifting in its final three stanzas to focus on the young soldier’s relationship to his beloved superior officer. Although the language is not conventionally sentimental, Dickinson testifies in these lines to the profound love shared between comrades in arms, a love that is represented as superior to marital love:

And when at Night – Our good Day done –
 I guard my Master’s Head –
 ‘Tis better than the Eider Duck’s
 Deep Pillow – to have shared –

 To foe of His – I’m deadly foe –
 None stir the second time –
 On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –
 Or an emphatic Thumb –

 Though I than He – may longer live
 He longer must – than I –
 For I have but the power to kill,
 Without – the power to die –

The poem’s final stanza represents both the soldier’s ultimate devotion to his comrades – his willingness to kill to save their lives – and also the traditional bravado of youth, the speaker’s conviction that he is both too brave and too powerful to be a mere mortal. Resituating this well-known poem in the context of the popular poetry of the Civil War makes clear the extent to which Dickinson was deeply engaged in responding to the work of her contemporaries as she reflected on the war’s violence.

While Dickinson echoes the popular trope of the talking gun, George Henry Boker models his paean to black soldiers on Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854), a poem well known to Americans in this era. Echoing both Tennyson’s meter and some of his core arguments, Boker claims that black soldiers can and should play a crucial role in the Union Army. Boker uses the imperative mode of the call to arms to enjoin his white readers to recognize and honor the bravery of black soldiers. Reproducing the visual image of a line of advancing soldiers, Boker uses a long narrow column of words to drive home the urgency of that message. Stanza 3 describes the flag sergeant’s address to the line just before the command to charge is given:

“Now,” the flag-sergeant cried,
 “Though death and hell betide,

Let the whole nation see
If we are fit to be
Free in this land; or bound
Down, like the whining hound, –
Bound with red stripes of pain
In our old chains again!”
Oh, what a shout there went
From the Black Regiment! (WH, 112)

First published in May 1863, Boker's poem preceded by several weeks the famous charge of the all-black Massachusetts Fifty-Fourth on Fort Wagner, but Boker was one of a number of writers and journalists who helped turn the tide of white Northern opinion by writing in praise of blacks' military service in the spring and summer of that year.

In the fifth stanza, Boker makes clear that the word “freedom” has a deeper meaning for black Union soldiers:

“Freedom!” their battle-cry –
“Freedom! or leave to die!”
Ah! And they meant the word,
Not as with us 'tis heard,
Not a mere party shout.
They gave their spirits out;
Trusted the end to God,
And on the gory sod
Rolled in triumphant blood. (WH, 113)

While Tennyson's “Charge of the Light Brigade” laments the blunder that led to the order for the cavalry to charge toward the artillery, the poem fundamentally honors the bravery of the soldiers, who served their country by obeying their orders: “Theirs not to reason why,/Theirs but to do and die.”¹⁸ By echoing Tennyson's dactylic dimeter, a falling meter that leads with stressed syllables, Boker implicitly argues that the black soldiers too are headed toward an inevitable death “on the gory sod.” Boker's poem contends that black soldiers will prove their worth to white Americans by dying gloriously in battle, “rolled in triumphant blood.”

As Boker's “Black Regiment” suggests, by the war's midpoint in 1863 many writers had begun to reckon with the terrible toll of the war in lives lost. Indeed some began to lament the war's losses as early as the fall of 1861. First published in November of that year, Ethelinda Beers's “The Picket-Guard” is a remarkable poem not only because of its early skepticism about the meaning of wartime deaths but also because of its focus on the death of a single foot soldier. The poem begins, “All quiet along

the Potomac,” with Beers taking aim at newspaper headlines that capture the big picture at the front but overlook the deaths of individual soldiers (WH, 65). The poem also critiques nationalist anthems and calls to arms that glorify wartime deaths and the long literary tradition of focusing on the heroic achievements of generals. By 1862, Beers’s widely read poem had been set to music by a Southern composer and was circulating in both the North and South.¹⁹ The poem relies on conventional sentimental imagery to evoke the soldier’s memories of a beloved wife and children back home:

His musket falls slack – his face, dark and grim,
Grows gentle with memories tender,
As he mutters a prayer for the children asleep –
For their mother – may Heaven defend her! (WH, 66)

But if Beers’s commitments are sentimental in these stanzas, they are surprisingly realistic and understated in others. The soldier dies not in a glorious heroic charge on enemy positions, but rather while walking alone on his ordinary nighttime round of picket duty:

Hark! was it the night-wind that rustled the leaves?
Was it moonlight so suddenly flashing?
It looked like a rifle – “Ha! Mary, good-by!”
And the life-blood is ebbing and plashing.

His death is evoked in two swift lines, and the final stanza underlines that the wider world is unchanged by his loss:

All quiet along the Potomac to-night,
No sound save the rush of the river;
While soft falls the dew on the face of the dead –
The picket’s off-duty forever! (WH, 66)

While Beers allows the dying man a swift and symbolic farewell to his distant wife, she refuses to close the poem with the comfort of the conventional argument that he has died in the service of the nation. Beers thus subtly critiques the nationalist anthem in general and, more particularly, the argument that a soldier’s death in battle is a profound and meaningful sacrifice. In its quiet understatement, Beers’s poem questions the purpose of this soldier’s death.

As Beers’s poem suggests, while scholars have traditionally sought understatement and skepticism in the work of high literary poets, emotional restraint shapes the commitments of popular poets as well. In “Driving Home the Cows,” for example, Kate Putnam Osgood tells the

story of an elderly father who loses his two older sons in the war only to have his third and youngest join up secretly because his father was reluctant to release him. Osgood here responds to the poetry of John Greenleaf Whittier, Lucy Larcom, and other New England poets who evoke a pastoral way of life that was already beginning to vanish in the 1860s. Revising these regional conventions, Osgood's poem argues that the Civil War has irrevocably changed the seemingly timeless world of the New England farmer. In the poem, the time since the youngest son's departure is marked by three rounds of passing seasons:

Thrice since then had the lanes been white,
And the orchards sweet with apple-bloom;
And now, when the cows came back at night,
The feeble father drove them home.

For news had come to the lonely farm
That three were lying where two had lain;
And the old man's tremulous, palsied arm
Could never lean on a son's again. (WH, 167–168)

Much of the poem focuses on the solitary father walking his farm on a summer evening. Going out to bring in the cows, he is startled to see that they are already returning:

Brindle, Ebony, Speckle, and Bess,
Shaking their horns in the evening wind,
Cropping the buttercups out of the grass –
But who was it following close behind?

Loosely swang in the idle air
The empty sleeve of army blue;
And worn and pale, from the crisping hair,
Looked out a face that the father knew; –

For Southern prisons will sometimes yawn,
And yield their dead unto life again;
And the day that comes with a cloudy dawn
In golden glory at last may wane.

The great tears sprang to their meeting eyes;
For the heart must speak when the lips are dumb,
And under the silent evening skies
Together they followed the cattle home. (WH, 168)

In this poem, the father and his one living son are reunited against all odds, and their reunion is the “golden glory” evoked in the poem's penultimate stanza. Yet they greet this reunion with the inward-turned

quiet that is expected of farmers from rural Maine, a quiet that is echoed in the poem's tone of restraint. While Osgood's poem implicitly endorses the bravery of the third son, what it does not do is reiterate the argument that soldiers must die for the greater good of the nation. Osgood thus rejects the arguments of Gibbons's "We Are Coming, Father Abraham," which figures soldier duty as a form of familial duty, and of Howe's "Battle Hymn," which urges readers "let us die to make men free." Indeed with its understated description of the aging farmer walking his land, Osgood's poem suggests that nothing could compensate a father for the loss of his sons – except perhaps the return of one of them. The poem thus walks a careful line: on the one hand, it suggests that father and son can attempt to resume the lives they left behind three years before, as they follow "the cattle home." On the other hand, it also makes clear that the father's loss is irrevocable and heightens the suffering of his old age. The "palsied" arm of the aging father is mirrored by the "empty sleeve" of his only surviving son, shared losses that are perhaps evoked by the men's silent "tears." For men brought up to farming work, such physical limitations may well prove devastating. In Osgood's poem, as in Whitman's "Come up from the fields Father," human losses are painfully juxtaposed with the plenitudes of spring and summer, with the imperturbable passing of the seasons. Because of its understated voice, what ultimately dominates in "Driving Home the Cows" is the evocation of unspeakable loss and of lives and families torn apart.

The painful disconnection between rebirth in the natural world and mourning in the human world is also the central focus of Henry Timrod's "Unknown Dead," a poem that strongly echoes the epitaph tradition of the English romantics. Known as the poet laureate of the Confederacy, the Charleston-born Henry Timrod wrote both calls to arms and poems honoring the birth of the Confederate nation in the war's early years.²⁰ By the summer of 1863, however, he was at times meditating in a darker vein on the war's losses. Linking Southern soldiers who have fallen on battlefields all across the continent, Timrod writes:

What strange and unsuspected link
Of feeling touched, has made me think –
While with a vacant soul and eye
I watch that gray and stony sky –
Of nameless graves on battle-plains
Washed by a single winter's rains,
Where, some beneath Virginian hills,
And some by green Atlantic rills,

Some by the waters of the West,
A myriad unknown heroes rest. (WH, 326)

Like Beers and Osgood, Timrod here laments the fate of the ordinary soldier, who dies unsung and whose loss must devastate his family at home:

And we can only dimly guess
What worlds of all this world's distress,
What utter woe, despair, and dearth,
Their fate has brought to many a hearth. (WH, 327)

More strongly still than the Osgood poem, Timrod's poem protests the painful disconnect between an imperturbable nature and a human world stricken with a grief so powerful that it seems to stop time. Timrod's speaker calls on nature to mourn in keeping with the sorrow of human hearts, yet he admits that nature is "oblivious" to the fate of human beings:

Just such a sky as this should weep
Above them, always, where they sleep;
Yet haply at this very hour,
Their graves are like a lover's bower;
And Nature's self, with eyes unwet,
Oblivious of the crimson debt
To which she owes her April grace,
Laughs gaily o'er their burial place. (WH, 327)

The intensity of the speaker's lament about nature's unfeeling response to the war's devastation suggests that Timrod's faith in the project of romanticism – a project that was central to the work of so many Confederate writers – has been shattered.

In 1867 a young Southern poet would take this lament about the separation from a Southern natural world to grotesque extreme in a poem that would not see print until 1916. Echoing the work of generations of white Southern poets before him, including Timrod in particular, Sidney Lanier figures the Southern landscape as a maternal body – a body that feeds its children not with milk but rather with blood:

Dear Mother-Earth
Of giant-birth,
Yon hills are thy large breasts, and often I
Have climbed their top nipples, fain to lie
And drink my mother's milk so near the sky.

But, Mother Earth,
Of giant-birth,
Thy mother milk comes curdled thick with woe.

Friends, blood is in the milk whereby we grow,
And life is heavy and death is marvelous slow. (WH, 189)

Lanier's speaker insists that there is no possibility for redemption or cleansing in a natural world that has seen such terrible bloodshed, and bloodshed for a cause that has been lost:

Sad furrowed hills
By full-wept rills,
The stainers have decreed the stains shall stay.
What clement hands might wash the stains away
Are chained, to make us rue a mournful day. (WH, 190)

Lanier's poem marks the end point, the ultimate despairing finish for Southern romanticism, as his speaker rages against a natural world that denies him any comfort or sustenance in the war's aftermath.

The disillusionment with romanticism was a particularly painful blow for Southern writers because of the centrality of romantic commitments to the Southern regional aesthetic. As the example of Osgood's poem makes clear, however, many Northern writers also meditated on the divide that separates an imperturbable nature from wartime human suffering. In his *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, Herman Melville turns again and again to this divide, arguing both that the romantic vocabulary is inadequate to the task of representing war's violence and that nature's cycles are powerless to redeem the devastating violence of modern war. Whereas a pastoral recuperative aesthetic dominates Whitman's Civil War poems, Melville remains far more skeptical.²¹ Melville's much-anthologized "Shiloh" foregrounds this skepticism. Yet even as he responds to the literary project of the English romantics, Melville also responds to popular American sources, including in particular Will Hays's song "The Drummer-Boy of Shiloh." Hays's lyrics offer an idealized portrait of a child soldier, who prays aloud as he lies dying on the field of battle:

"Oh, Mother," said the dying boy,
Look down from heaven on me,
Receive me to thy fond embrace –
Oh, take me home to thee.
I've loved my country as my God:
To serve them both I've tried,"
He smiled, shook hands, death seized the boy
Who prayed before he died.²²

While Melville's poem echoes the song's intense focus on the prayers of dying soldiers, Melville rejects Hays's consoling pieties and patriotism,

arguing instead that death in battle must necessarily “undeceive” men of their patriotic illusions.

Perhaps the most unsettling feature of Melville’s “Shiloh” is the “wheeling” motion of the swallows who circle the former battlefield, their circular motion contrasting with the stillness of the landscape below:²³

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
The swallows fly low
Over the fields in clouded days,
The forest-field of Shiloh (WH, 276)

This opening stillness – both the lack of movement and the lack of sound – strongly contrasts with the scene of suffering that the middle of the poem presents:

Over the field where April rain
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of the night
That followed the Sunday fight

Nature may offer some “solace” to the “parched ones,” but that solace is surely provisional for the many soldiers who died that night:

Around the church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
And natural prayer
Of dying foemen mingled there –
Foeman at morn, but friends at eve –
Fame or country least their care:
(What like a bullet can undeceive!) (WH, 277)

Whereas Hays makes the drummer boy’s deathbed prayer the central message of his song, Melville presents the church on the battlefield as a factual detail laden with irony. The “natural prayer” of the dying soldier is left unstated and thus remains a paradox in the poem, one that is emphasized by the often cited parenthetical: “(What like a bullet can undeceive!).”²⁴ Hope for fame and love of country, like the “natural prayer” of the dying man, can be swiftly undone by a fatal wound:

But now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skim,
And all is hushed at Shiloh.

Melville here amplifies the quiet that we also note at the end of Osgood’s “Driving Home the Cows.” The poem thus also seems to call for quiet to take the place of the patriotic pieties offered by songs like “The Drummer

Boy of Shiloh.” Closing with a reiterated “sh,” Melville’s poem enjoins both readers and battlefield visitors to silence – to silent contemplation of a suffering that cannot be represented.

Like his Northern contemporary Melville, the black Southern poet George Moses Horton uses the restrained postures of romanticism to mourn the war’s devastation. Born into slavery near Chapel Hill, Horton supported himself for much of his adult life by writing love poems made-to-order for young white male students at the University of North Carolina, having persuaded his master to let him hire his own time. Remarkably Horton also published two collections of poetry during these decades; he published a third collection in the summer of 1865, with the sponsorship of an officer from the Ninth Michigan Cavalry, a unit Horton had traveled with that summer. In this third collection, *Naked Genius*, Horton includes an eclectic array of poems, including celebratory marching songs for soldiers, poems in praise of Union generals, elegies for Lincoln, and laments for the war’s devastation.²⁵

While mid-twentieth century critics largely dismissed Horton’s work as derivative, the current scholarly reassessment of nineteenth-century poetry offers us more nuanced ways of understanding his use of imitation. Because he supported himself by writing love poems made-to-order, Horton became extremely adept at reiterating and revising the poetic conventions admired by his white Southern clients and supporters. One of the more remarkable features of Horton’s postwar collection is that he continues to address and represent the white Southern readers who have been his primary audience throughout his career as a poet, even though many of the poems in this collection celebrate the Union victory and the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. In “The Southern Refugee,” Horton uses a melancholy tone to lament the displacement of many Southerners – both white and black – in the war’s aftermath. On its surface the poem reads like a conventional romantic lament for separation from one’s home, but beneath that conventional surface, the poem subtly evokes the specific experience of black Southerners, talking back to the racist stereotypes of Dan Emmett’s “Dixie,” for instance. The first two stanzas establish the poem’s commitment to the imagistic repertoire of high literary romanticism:

What sudden ill the world await,
 From my dear residence I roam;
 I must deplore the bitter fate,
 To straggle from my native home.

The verdant willow droops her head,
And seems to bid a fare thee well;
The flowers with tears their fragrance shed,
Alas! their parting tale to tell. (WH, 207)

Moving beyond these generic conventions, however, Horton begins in the third stanza to gesture toward both the violence of slavery and the devastation of the South during four years of civil war:

'Tis like the loss of Paradise,
Or Eden's garden left in gloom,
Where grief affords us no device;
Such is thy lot, my native home.

Here Horton punctures the myth of the edenic Southern paradise: the phrase "Eden's garden left in gloom" obliquely suggests both the violence of the slave system that sustained Southern agriculture and the ravaging of Southern landscapes through the war. Carefully avoiding any mention of a collective of black Southerners, he keeps the poem in the first person singular. Yet it is also that first person singular that enables Horton to represent the experience of both black and white Southerners. Horton next echoes the conventional argument that any Southerner who leaves his birthplace must inevitably lament this departure.

How can I from my seat remove
And leave my ever devoted home,
And the dear garden which I love,
The beauty of my native home? (WH, 207)

And yet, Horton closes the poem with a strong rejection of such nostalgia. Indeed in the poem's final stanza, Horton offers a pointed critique of the racist, stereotyped speaker in Dan Emmett's "I Wish I Was in Dixie's Land," who looks back with longing to the land he has left behind: "I wish I was in de land ob cotton/Old times dar are not forgotten." Horton's speaker makes clear that he leaves the South without regret:

I trust I soon shall dry the tear
And leave forever hence to roam,
Far from a residence so dear,
The place of beauty – my native home.

In "The Southern Refugee," Horton uses the conventions of the romantic lament to lend dignity and moral weight to the experience of African Americans, many of whom traveled North and West in the war's aftermath

to escape the South's legacy of racist violence. Following the war's end, Horton would himself move north to Philadelphia; disillusioned by Northern racism, he likely traveled to Liberia a few years later and may have stayed there permanently.²⁶ Nearly 70 years old at the war's end, Horton obliquely foretells the years of travel that lie ahead of him when his speaker declares that he "leave[s] forever hence to roam" (WH, 207).

While Joshua McCarter Simpson figures the United States as a landscape divided by white tyranny and black suffering in his impassioned "Song of the Alien American," George Moses Horton takes a more restrained and literary approach in "The Southern Refugee," tailoring both his message and his use of poetic conventions to the white Southern audience who had made his career as a poet possible. In "The Southern Refugee," Horton offers white Southerners a conventional romantic lament for the exile so many would experience in the years after the war. Beneath that conventional surface, however, Horton also gives voice to the experience of black Southerners, who had always understood that the image of an Edenic South was an illusion, one that was integral to white Southern ideology. Thus, although "The Southern Refugee" is not an explicit protest song, in its subtle registering of the black Southern experience, it resists white Southern ideology. Horton uses the literary sophistication of romanticism to puncture the racist stereotypes of Dan Emmett's "Dixie," underlining the potency of imitative strategies for African American writers in particular and for Civil War era writers more broadly.

For Horton, as for so many other writers of the Civil War era, imitation becomes a means of resisting dominant ideologies, reaching a range of disparate audiences, and threading undercurrents of self-expression into poems that address the larger challenges facing the Union, Confederacy, and United States. Because of the shaping role of literary convention in the English-language poetic tradition and because of the cultural centrality poetry enjoyed in mid-nineteenth-century America, this genre was uniquely well adapted for writers' strategic use of imitation. By echoing and revising a wealth of contemporary textual and musical discourses, Civil War era poets used imitation as a means of articulating resistance, reflecting on the many meanings of the war and the challenges that would face the newly reunited nation in its aftermath.

Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all poems are cited from "Words for the Hour": *A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), which I coedited with Cristanne Miller. The Simpson text

- appears on p. 37. Hereafter, poems from this source will be cited in text with WH followed by the page number. I am grateful to Theresa Strouth Gaul, Desiree Henderson, Cole Hutchison, Jennifer Putzi, and Alex Socarides for their helpful responses to an earlier version of this essay.
- 2 For further discussion of Simpson's work, see Ivy G. Wilson, *Specters of Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially pp. 74–76.
 - 3 For a fuller discussion of Civil War poetry, see my *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).
 - 4 For historical analysis of the popular literature of the Civil War, see Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
 - 5 Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 479.
 - 6 Ibid., pp. 487–488.
 - 7 For a fuller discussion of Howe's "Battle Hymn," see my *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, pp. 29–40.
 - 8 Julia Ward Howe, "John Brown's Body" (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1861).
 - 9 For fuller discussion of variant versions of "Dixie," see Coleman Hutchison, "Whistling 'Dixie' for the Union (Nation, Anthem, Revision)," *American Literary History* 19 (2007), 603–628. See also my discussion of "Dixie" revisions in *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, pp. 19–25.
 - 10 William Shepperson (ed.), *War Songs of the South* (Richmond: West and Johnson, 1862), pp. 17–19.
 - 11 Daniel D. Emmett, "I Wish I Was in Dixie's Land" (New York: Firth Pond, 1860).
 - 12 Tony Pastor, *Book of Six Hundred Comic Songs and Speeches* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1867), p. 32.
 - 13 George F. Root, "Just Before the Battle, Mother" (Chicago: Root and Cady, 1864).
 - 14 Tony Pastor includes Johnston's "Skedaddling Song" under the title "Parody on 'Just before the Battle, Mother'" in his 201 *Bowery Songster* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1867), p. 19.
 - 15 Eugene T. Johnston, "The Mother of All Songs" (Boston: Horace Partridge, n.d.).
 - 16 R. W. Franklin's dating of Dickinson's manuscripts suggests that she wrote more than 900 poems between 1861 and 1865. For a fuller discussion of Dickinson's response to the war, see my *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, pp. 130–186; Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), pp. 147–175; Renee Bergland, "The Eagle's Eye: Dickinson's View of Battle" in *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*, Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz (eds.) (London: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 133–156; and Eliza Richards, "'How News Must Feel When Traveling': Dickinson and Civil War Media," in *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*, pp. 157–180.

- 17 Ralph W. Franklin (ed.), *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), F 764.
- 18 Cited from the Poetry Foundation, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174586>, accessed June 10, 2015.
- 19 Indeed so popular was Beers's poem in the South that a white male Confederate writer argued that he was in fact its author; this was only one of a number of plagiarism cases in the Civil War era in which male writers sought credit for female-authored poems. For further discussion of women poets and plagiarism, see Jennifer Putzi, "'Some Queer Freak of Taste': Gender, Authorship, and the 'Rock Me to Sleep' Controversy," *American Literature* 84.4 (December 2012), 769–795.
- 20 For a fuller discussion of Timrod's Civil War poetry, see my *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, pp. 189–197. For the cultural history of Confederate poetry, see Coleman Hutchison, *Apples and Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), pp. 99–142.
- 21 For discussion of Melville's response to romanticism and its pastoral commitments, see Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). For further discussion of *Battle-Pieces*, see my *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, pp. 251–280, and also Cody Marrs, "A Wayward Art: *Battle-Pieces* and Melville's Poetic Turn," *American Literature* 82.1 (March 2010), pp. 91–119.
- 22 Will S. Hays, "The Drummer Boy of Shiloh" (Louisville, KY: D. P. Faulds, 1863).
- 23 For a reading of shifts in the observer's perspective – and Melville's engagement with painterly aesthetics – see Hsuan Hsu, "War, Ekphrasis, and Elliptical Form in *Battle-Pieces*," *Nineteenth-Century Studies* 16 (2002), 51–71.
- 24 For a reading that attends closely to the ideological resonances of this parenthetical, see Michael Warner, "'What Like a Bullet Can Undecieve?'" *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003), 41–54.
- 25 For an account of Horton's life and work, see Joan Sherman's introduction in her *The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997). For an economic analysis of Horton's authorship and his position in the Chapel Hill community, see Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 53–88. For further discussion of Horton's Civil War poetry, see my *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, pp. 226–250.
- 26 Reginald Pitts traces Horton's postwar travels in his "'Let Us Desert This Friendless Place': George Moses Horton in Philadelphia – 1866," *Journal of Negro History* 80.4 (Autumn 1995), 145–156.

CHAPTER 8

Children's Literature

James Marten

The Civil War penetrated virtually every aspect of writing for children. Authors adapted prior assumptions and forms to the national emergency and added new values to the canonical strictures to behave morally, obediently, and modestly. “Fighting Against Wrong, and for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful,” the motto of *The Little Corporal*, a children’s magazine published just after the war ended, combined the moral and patriotic urgency reflected in writing for children and youth. Books and magazines helped children analyze the causes and progress of the war and provided a blueprint for their responses to the conflict.¹

Prior to the war, children’s literature focused on self-improvement – temperance, piety, diligence, and pacifism were among the featured values urged on readers – rather than on civic responsibility and on the differences between white and black Americans rather than the injustices of slavery. This was true for religious as well as secular publishers. Although children’s literature produced in the 1860s continued to promote moral behavior and offer stories of hardworking, humble, and obedient children and youth, their content also broadened to include political discussions, serious accounts of battles and campaigns, and examples of children taking part in the war effort. Old values were not so much forgotten as complemented by such war-appropriate virtues as patriotism, a commitment to antislavery, and physical courage. Even though the literature produced during the war seems stilted, hopelessly bound by moral absolutes, and populated by priggish do-gooders, its introduction of secular values and adventurous youngsters helped initiate the “shift away from moral didacticism” described by Anne Scott McLeod.²

The most important content appeared in the fifteen to twenty northern “juvenile” magazines published throughout the 1860s. Some represented religious denominations or were generically – if enthusiastically – Protestant; others, such as *The Student and Schoolmate* and *Our Young Folks*, were secular enterprises. Novels also entered the fray. They featured

exciting tales of danger, escape, and treachery in which characters learned how their individual efforts contributed to the survival of their families, communities, or nation. In the South, wartime shortages of ink, paper, and skilled printers prevented publishers from producing much in the way of literature, but throughout the Confederacy patriotic publishers put out schoolbooks with names such as *The Dixie Primer*, *The Confederate Spelling Book*, and *A New Southern Grammar*. Indeed, nearly three-fourths of the children's books published in the Confederacy were schoolbooks, ranging from Latin grammars to alphabets. Although not all of these publications addressed the war directly, many promoted the Confederate cause, defended slavery, and condemned the North.³ Finally, the war inspired religious and secular writers to publish tracts, textbooks, and even a journal for African Americans to aid their transition from slavery to freedom.

Describing the War

Almost as soon as the fighting began, northern magazines began bringing the war to their readers. *The Student and Schoolmate* periodically published "Letters from the Army" describing soldiers' camp life and a series called "Campaigning" on the organization and deployment of armies. Col. Charles C. Nott wrote information-packed letters to students at a New York City school that were published as *Sketches of the War*.⁴ Leading northern children's magazines such as *The Student and Schoolmate*, *The Little Pilgrim*, *Our Young Folks*, *The Little Corporal*, *Forrester's Playmate*, and *Merry's Museum* offered information, opinions, or war-related trivia in virtually every type of feature: short stories, nature sketches, travel articles, "declamation" pieces, and even games and puzzles.

A few novels revealed the gritty reality of war. The title character of J. T. Trowbridge's *Frank Manly, the Drummer Boy* samples the ubiquitous army temptations of gambling and liquor, while the hero of *Frank on a Gun-Boat* survives an explosion in his gun turret that left the "deck ... slippery with blood and the turret ... completely covered with it. The shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying were awful." For a moment, "the young hero was so sick he could scarcely stand."⁵

Most readers would not, of course, ever join the army or see a battle, but authors often thrust their young characters into harm's way. Twelve-year-old (or younger) protagonists fought battles and endured prison camps. Stock characters in these stories included courageous drummer boys who often gave their lives for the Union cause; kindly, grizzled veterans; and oily Confederates. Characters represented the very best in

patriotic, compassionate, and pious northern youth and the worst in mean, impulsive southerners.

Perhaps the best-known writer for children from the 1850s through the 1870s was the prolific Oliver Optic (William T. Adams).⁶ Starting with *The Soldier Boy; or, Tom Somers in the Army* and *The Yankee Middy; or, The Adventures of a Naval Officer*, Optic produced two popular trilogies, the "Army and Navy Stories," which chronicled the fictional adventures of seventeen-year-old twin brothers Tom and Jack Somers. The boys' war-time adventures followed a strict formula. Accompanied by a squad of loyal sidekicks, Jack and Tom demonstrated martial skill and bravery in large unit actions as well as behind-the-lines spy capers. The boys usually experienced a round of captures and escapes, met sympathetic southern Unionists, and made their way back to safety. In addition to common middle-class virtues like loyalty, modesty, and fairness, the Somerses displayed bravery, patriotism, and their superiority to decadent, traitorous southerners. The Somers boys' martial exploits caused the books to transcend typical antebellum storytelling. Although the dialogue is hopelessly moralistic by modern standards, by mid-nineteenth century standards they are dangerously exciting and secular.

Gail Schmunk Murray has argued that Civil War literature for children was highly gendered, with different kind of stories written for boys than for girls. Boys were shown playing at war or actually fighting in real battles; girls were portrayed as home-front heroines or as nurses in training. But a female version of Oliver Optic's youthful heroes was the twelve-year-old title character of Jane Goodwin Austin's *Dora Darling*. Dora's drunken southern father offers a terrible role model; after her Unionist mother dies and her brothers join the Confederate army, the farm is sold and Dora goes to live with a cruel aunt. The story sheds its Dickensian tone when Dora runs away and begins a series of adventures and coincidences that includes meeting up with a kind escaped slave, working as a nurse with the Union army, taming gruff Yankees, saving a kind Yankee captain (from her own brother), and then converting that same brother to the Union cause. *Dora Darling* offers a girl-friendly tale of adventure rarely seen before the Civil War.⁷

Although Edmund Kirke's "The Boy of Chancellorville" put its twelve-year-old hero through a bloody battle and a Confederate prison, juvenile novels were more likely than magazines to put their characters in harm's way. Short stories often featured home-front children responding to the war in predictable ways: forming their own "boy" companies and playing soldier; supporting troops by raising money, packing boxes with

supplies, and sewing; or taking on the responsibilities normally fulfilled by absent fathers or brothers.⁸

Little Women may be the best-known novel on the Civil War home front written for any age group, but the war is less a central component of the plot than it is a backdrop to the various personal challenges and crises faced by the young women in the March family. But many less-known books dealt with the moral challenges of life on the northern home front. *Frank's Campaign*, an early effort by Horatio Alger, features many of the plot devices of the dozens of "rags to riches" books he published after war. Frank wins a school contest with a composition on what boys can do to help win the war; his patriotism becomes much less abstract when his father enlists and Frank needs to assume family responsibilities. Along the way he helps foil an evil war profiteer who is also trying to take away the family farm.⁹

A number of stories managed to encourage readers to join the war effort by supporting the troops as well as refugees, freedmen, and other civilians affected by the war, while at the same time learning common prewar values like humility and generosity. The spoiled children in Lydia Maria Child's "The Two Christmas Evenings" learn the true spirit of the holiday by raising money for a local orphan asylum and for books and toys for contraband children by staging tableaux, giving patriotic speeches, and selling homemade clothes and household items. A girl in another Child story, "The Cloud with the Silver Lining," gives the money she had hoarded to spend at a sanitary fair – giant bazaars held in northern towns and cities to raise money for the U.S. Sanitary Commission – to a poor soldier's orphan. In stories such as these, readers learned that even in wartime certain values were universal.¹⁰

Another way children could prove their loyalty to America and their Christian worth was by assuming the responsibilities left by absent adults. Although not a new plot device, the war offered even more poignant opportunities for children to show maturity and virtue beyond their years. Emily Huntington Miller's "The House that Johnny Rented," serialized in *The Little Corporal*, told the story of the White family, whose father goes off to become a chaplain in the Union army. His invalid wife and several children, including twelve-year-old Johnny, have to fend for themselves. Johnny locates a smaller but cheaper cottage when they are forced out of the parsonage. There the children raise a garden, help their mother, fret about their father, and help teach a contraband boy to read. The children are obedient and cheerful, they patriotically bad-mouth Confederate

generals, and they discover that racial differences are less important than they previously thought.¹¹

Civil War-era children also learned that being a good person was equivalent to being a loyal American. The teenaged title character in Amanda M. Douglas's *Kathie's Soldiers* fulfills her patriotic duty by volunteering at the local sanitary fair and caring for a soldier's daughter. But she also exhibits a moral backbone by refusing to gossip and criticize like the so-called fashionable girls at her school and standing up to the shallow and contemptuous daughter of a dishonest army contractor. Writers made it clear that home-front duties were just as important as battlefield duties. As a young lieutenant declares in another home-front novel, *Battles at Home*, "Our battles must be just where we are put to fight them."¹²

Like the wise lieutenant, many authors cast the war as a metaphor for the everyday struggle between good and evil. That struggle, and the redemption that would inevitably come through devoted and courageous service, were prewar tropes that echoed through the war years.

Explaining the War

With rare exceptions, antebellum books and stories for children had barely noticed the political and moral issues of the day. As McLeod writes, "All juvenile fiction before 1860 was much the same: simple narratives, always pointing to moral, featureless backgrounds, stock characters moving through patterned plots." Slavery "was all but invisible." The exception that proved the rule was Lydia Maria Child's *Juvenile Miscellany*. Fallout from its markedly antislavery point of view helped lead to its eventual failure after a ten-year run. But the outbreak of the war rapidly politicized writing for youngsters, which sought to inspire patriotism by defining northern war aims, blaming slavery for causing the war, and recognizing the humanity of former slaves. A character in J. T. Trowbridge's "The Turning of the Leaf" summarized the North's political outlook: "Slavery was the cause of the war; and God permitted the war in order that slavery might be destroyed." The benefits of the American political system, argued *Merry's Museum*, made "rebellion in such a country as this . . . the highest of crimes." Other writers for children, like their counterparts who wrote for adults, stressed the arrogance and laziness of slave owners and promoted the idea of the alleged "slave power conspiracy" that had led the South to war.¹³

Although northern authors were comfortable attacking the institution of slavery and slave owners themselves, they struggled with their presentation

of African Americans, most of whom – adults as well as children – appeared as mere objects of pity or charity. In Christie Pearl's "The Contraband," a half-dozen well-off children were taught a lesson familiar to prewar readers but with a wartime twist when they tried to pass off unwanted clothes by giving them to a clothing drive for freedchildren in the South. Their father mildly scolds them and convinces them to display true charity by donating some of their favorite clothes and toys instead. Freed and enslaved African Americans were frequently incorporated into political lessons in this way but rarely presented as political, economic, or intellectual equals to whites. For every intelligent, heroic, character like the self-assured Pompey in Trowbridge's *The Three Scouts*, there were many others burdened with antebellum stereotypes or limited to submissive supporting roles. Reflecting the North's limited racial vision, most writers could, at best, imagine African Americans as rather helpless, pitiable beings.¹⁴

An example of white characters actually interacting with African Americans on a personal level was so rare as to prove the point. A story appearing in *Forrester's Playmate* in early 1864 related an incident between the narrator and a free boy named Jim Dick. During an afternoon of play with other neighborhood boys, the whites drive Jim away by calling him "'negro,' 'blackamoor,' and other ill names." The little black boy, his feelings hurt, goes home. Later, Jim asks the narrator not to call him those names again. "These words went to my heart," recalled the narrator, who told the tale as a true story, "I burst into tears, and from that time I resolved I would never again be guilty of abusing a poor black."¹⁵

It cannot really be said that the war inspired a "literature" for Southern children, although the few surviving examples display themes very similar to those in northern magazines. Most Confederate-era periodicals for children were published by religious denominations. The Baptists published *Child's Index*, the Presbyterians the *Children's Friend*, and the Methodists the *Children's Guide*. The short-lived *Child's Banner* was a nondenominational religious publication out of Salisbury, North Carolina. Despite their theological orientation, these publications explained the war to children and encouraged their involvement in the southern cause. The war finally gave southern publishers a chance to put into action a minor facet of antebellum southern nationalism: creating "southern books for southern children."¹⁶

Writers for southern children matched their northern counterparts in their emphases on living Godly and patriotic lives. Stories in the *Child's Index*, for example, described the religious spirit in the rebel army, compared the Confederacy's war for independence to the American

Revolution, and explained how the Bible justified slavery. In one story a little girl converts her soldier-father on his sickbed, while in another a boy, despite his desperate desire to demonstrate his bravery and patriotism by joining the army, stays home to help his mother after his father's death in battle. The *Deaf Mute Casket*, published by the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, even offered the story of a valiant drummer and advised girls to prepare to educate the next generation of southerners by studying hard.

Only a handful of book-length, noneducational imprints appeared in the Confederate states, and they were limited to alphabets and collections of stories and poems. *For the Little Ones*, "Dedicated to the Little Girls and Boys of the Southern Confederacy," included a mother's description of her two-year-old playing soldier, and "Willie's Political Alphabet," which offered such rhymes as "A is for the Army-now don't you forget/ And B's for the Banner, the 'flag of the free.'" The pocket-sized *Boys and Girls Stories of the War* contained tales of a refugee woman and her two children, a loyal slave, a rebel prisoner in New Orleans, and the horrific fighting at the 1863 Battle of Chancellorsville.¹⁷

The most important writing for Confederate children – in terms of quantity as well as depth of engagement with the war – appeared in the scores of primers, readers, and arithmetics produced by southern presses. Antebellum southerners had often complained about the dependence of southern schools on textbooks published in the North, which many believed promoted an antisouthern, antislavery bias. After secession, publishers in cities all over the Confederacy acted on this belief, producing nearly 100 schoolbooks.¹⁸

Patriotic authors promoted section-specific interests in ways similar to John H. Rice's long description in *System of Modern Geography* in which he promised that the "Political and Physical Condition of the States composing the Confederate States of America are fully treated of, and their progress in Commerce, Education, Agriculture, Internal Improvements and Mechanic Arts, prominently set forth." His volume, "compiled by a Southern man, published upon our own soil," would correct "every yankee work" that had "studiously concealed" the "actual conditions and resources" of the South.¹⁹

Obviously, Confederate authors did not reject their traditional responsibilities to inculcate morality and offer narratives of good behavior; they merely added Confederate values to the ones readily accepted by most Americans. Some limited their promotion of Confederate values to their titles – the word "Dixie" appeared in several, for instance – or to

brief mentions of Confederate or southern institutions, values, or leaders. Some histories and readers simply listed the names of Confederate states, politicians, or generals. Arithmetics nodded toward the war raging around them by blending generic story problems with those tinged with Confederate superiority, like the famous problem cited by countless historians of the era: "If one Confederate soldier can whip 7 yankees, how many soldiers can whip 49 yankees?"²⁰

But several schoolbooks went deeper, showing how the North had caused the war, justifying slavery, and glorifying Confederate heroes. Two geography texts offered the most thorough analysis of the differences between Yankees and Confederates. Rice insisted that enslavement and Christianization had rescued Africans from the "degraded and savage condition" in which they had lived in Africa. He promoted the stereotype of Yankees as a "keen, thrifty . . . money-loving and money-making" people whose "infidelity and a reckless puritanical fanaticism" were "fast robbing the people of all ennobling traits of character." The Constitution had been "overthrown," and in the North "despotism reigns supreme in the hands of a political anti-slavery party." He contrasted affairs in the United States to the Confederacy, where slavery "is the corner stone of her governmental fabric" and where "an indomitable spirit of self-reliance" regulates men's behavior and "a career of greatness" has "just commenced." Mrs. M. B. Moore also criticized the northerners who controlled the U. S. government in her *Geographical Reader*. "Once the most prosperous country in the world," the United States had been ripped apart after northerners found slavery unprofitable in their region, when they began "to preach, to lecture, and to write about the sin of slavery." Since Lincoln had "declared war" on the Confederate States, the "earth has been drenched with blood."²¹

It is worth noting that northern schoolbooks published between 1861 and 1865 barely mentioned the war. A few grammars included military and political terms in their exercises, some arithmetic texts incorporated the war into scattered story problems, and several readers featured stories, documents, or excerpts from patriotic speeches, songs, and poems. Of course, northern publishers and educators were building neither a country nor a publishing industry from scratch, so there was less of a need to rush patriotic sentiments into print. Students made due with older editions (which southern authors borrowed from quite liberally) that already contained founding documents and stirring speeches from the past.

It is, of course, almost impossible to gauge just how many children even read these books and magazines, let alone how many actually

absorbed the lessons contained in the literature intended for them. This is especially true for the Confederate states. But if the Boston boy Gerald Norcross, who turned seven in 1861, is any indication, affluent northeasterners were enthusiastic consumers of wartime literature. Gerald filled his diary with descriptions of war play and lists of reading matter he devoured and shared with friends during the last two years of the war. They ranged from dime novels like *War Trails*, *Vicksburg Spy*, and *Old Hal Williams; or the Spy of Atlanta* to factual narratives such as *Life and Campaigns of Gen. McClellan*, *Days and Nights on the Battlefield*, and *Following the Flag* to Oliver Optic's dual trilogies. He was also a subscriber to *Our Young Folks*.²²

A slightly more direct kind of evidence of the influence of wartime literature, at least among middle-class, urban northerners, appears in the handful of "amateur newspapers" that survive from the 1860s. Some were professionally printed and distributed throughout neighborhoods or towns, whereas others were handwritten and limited to immediate families. The juvenile editors mimicked the great political and social debates of the day, featuring in their little publications almost every genre: adventure stories, fire-breathing editorials, correspondence, serials, poetry, and jokes.

One example was the *Athenaeum*, which was published by the boys of Newark High School in New Jersey, as a handwritten monthly. The stories, poems, and essays, originally composed as class assignments, covered topics ranging from the sack of Lawrence, Kansas, to the humorous story "Uncle Zeke at the Fair," where an old "down easter" battled crowds and high prices at the local sanitary fair. Some were accompanied by detailed line drawings. One editorial called on readers to forgive soldiers who succumbed to camp temptations and to overlook their shortcomings. "It becomes us not to censure the soldier who has enlisted under the banner we love," declared the teenaged editorialist, "to keep it sacred from vile traitorous hands, or give his life as an alternative!" Another piece borrowed the style of human interest travelogues that were regular features in juvenile magazines by tracing the "career" of a leather boot, from the slaughterhouse and tannery through bloody battles, Libby Prison, and its final resting place as a war "memento" in its owner's closet after returning safely home.²³

Writing for African Americans

Not surprisingly, publishers produced relatively little reading material specifically for African Americans; after all, they comprised less than 2 percent of the northern population in 1860 and most southern blacks were slaves.²⁴

Nevertheless, a third genre of Civil War literature for children appeared late in the war: newspapers and books for the tens of thousands of freed-people crowding into schools throughout the South. In addition to educational materials – including large boards printed with numbers, letters, or Bible verses for use in missionary schools that educated scores of children and adults in a single room – the American Tract Society published an “Educational Series” in 1864 and 1865. *The Freedman’s Spelling Book*, *The Freedman’s Primer*, *The Freedman’s Second Reader*, and *The Freedman’s Third Reader* resembled typical antebellum schoolbooks. They also contained material that would never have appeared in a northern school before the war, including excerpts from the speeches of Abraham Lincoln as well as documents and biographical segments on black heroes and heroines such as Paul Cuffe, Toussaint L’Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, and Phillis Wheatley and poems and stories describing the bravery and patriotism of black Union soldiers.

Although not intended specifically for children, evidence suggests that *The Freedman*, another American Tract Society publication, was read by black boys and girls. Published every month between January 1864 and early 1869, more than half a million copies of *The Freedman* were distributed in 1865–1866 alone. The four-page monthly resembled any other juvenile magazine or Sunday School paper, with writing exercises, simple reading and arithmetic lessons, poems, prayers, and general information about geography, nature, and history. Most issues ignored race entirely. The Ten Commandments appeared in every issue, and articles, stories, and exercises emphasized the importance of such traditional values as thrift, hard work, temperance, honesty, and perseverance. Readers were never, however, allowed to forget the responsibilities that freedom had laid on the former slaves. “But what is it to be free?” one writing example intoned. “I am free to be a good and noble man, and not an idle, bad, worthless fellow.”²⁵

Nonetheless, *The Freedman* did offer readers glimpses of their African heritage and current contributions to the Union war effort. Many articles boasted of the large number of black men joining the Union army, admired their soldierly behavior, and described their battlefield exploits. Mirroring Confederate arithmetics, students were asked: “If the freedmen should kill, or take prisoners, 394 of the rebels who numbered 462, how many would be left to run away after the battle?”²⁶

Lydia Maria Child, continuing her prewar efforts to offer child-friendly discussions of race, also published *The Freedman’s Book*, which focused primarily on biographical sketches and excerpts by African Americans such as Phillis Wheatley and Harriet Jacobs. Child encouraged her

readers to imagine beyond the constricts placed on them by many white authors; the role models she held up before them included the astronomer Benjamin Banneker, the revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture, and the editor, reformer, and statesman Frederick Douglass. Child emphasized their independence and achievements over their acquisition of white middle-class values.²⁷

Despite these positive articles, most wartime publications for African Americans stressed responsibility and dependence and accepted contemporary notions about racial hierarchy. By de-emphasizing liberty and highlighting obedience and piety, *The Freedman* and other publications for African Americans undercut any encouragement for growth and equality and helped build the obstacles to true freedom that freedpeople would face following the war.

Aftermaths

Although the Reconstruction process continued until the late 1870s in some parts of the South, the Civil War faded quickly from writings for children, and Reconstruction was barely mentioned. Courtney Weikle-Mills suggests that the war caused writers for children to place more emphasis on citizenship in general and on the responsibilities of children as citizens in particular, but the war as an "event" virtually disappeared from children's magazines and books. Union and Confederate veterans alike tried to influence the interpretation of the causes and outcome of the war in schoolbooks published during the last two or three decades of the century, but with only mixed success.²⁸

There were a few exceptions. Three years after the war ended, a dark novel called *The Princess of the Moon*, published by a "Lady of Warrenton, Virginia" and subtitled *A Confederate Fairy Story*, was dedicated to "the children of the South, who suffered during the late War." A Confederate returns to find his home destroyed and parents dead. Mounting a flying horse provided by a mysterious fairy, he tours a ravaged South and a prosperous North, where he sees Yankee homes filled with belongings plundered from southern houses. The discouraged veteran flees to the moon, where lives a tolerant kingdom of fairies. He finds refuge after telling them of his and his country's plight. He eventually marries a princess and becomes the heir apparent to the throne. Suddenly, huge balloons appear and greedy Yankees clutching carpetbags – northern "carpetbaggers" were legendary villains in southern versions of Reconstruction – swarm onto the moon. Fairies chase them away, but Randolph can never go home; in this

allegorical novel, Reconstruction never ends and Redemption – the retaking of southern states by southern Democrats – never occurs.²⁹

Virtually no original war-related novels for juveniles appeared after the summer of 1865, although reprints of a number of popular dime novels came out in the mid-1870s, and editions of Oliver Optic's pair of trilogies occasionally appeared throughout the rest of the century. For several years after the end of the war, children's magazines promoted sectional reconciliation with stories and travelogues showing that southerners generally supported the Union during the war and fought for the Confederacy or paid Confederate taxes only because they could not resist the manipulations of the slavocrat minority.

A *Student and Schoolmate* "dialogue" featured characters named "Palmetto," "Buckeye," and other nom de plumes associated with particular states or sections. After they bicker over sectional interests for a time, their "Uncle Sam" eventually convinces them to reconcile, and they declare, "We have come forth from our trial purified and strong, have agreed to let bygones be bygones, and now we are ready to take the lead in the world's grand march to the highest civilization." Poems and stories published in the months following Appomattox also supported returning veterans, while *The Little Corporal* urged its readers to redirect their war work by aiding soldiers' orphans.³⁰

Beginning in January 1867 Optic continued to explore war issues and subjects in *Oliver Optic's Magazine*, which featured several battle stories and a number of biographies of important Union generals, with at least seven separate articles on General Ulysses S. Grant. Even Optic, however, decided the well of war stories had run dry by 1870.

One of the few postwar, southern-produced children's magazines barely noticed either the war or Reconstruction. The editors of the *Southern Boys and Girls' Monthly* complained that "too much have we been disposed to rely on other sections of the land and other countries of the world to supply us with literature for the old and the young." Although a handful of poems, stories, and puzzles touched on war themes, most of the pieces published during the magazine's nearly two-year run consisted of highly moralistic stories about nature, travel, and history, as well as cheerful poems about death.³¹

Conclusion

In an essay published early in 1866, the abolitionist, former Union army officer, and writer Thomas Wentworth Higginson briefly reviewed

the children's books inspired by the war. He liked the campaign narratives, which he found "more interesting than fiction" but dismissed Oliver Optic's books as "spirited and correct enough" but hastily written and filled with caricatures. He also criticized novelists who burdened African American characters with racist dialects and behavior. In general, Higginson found little to recommend Civil War writing for children and youth.³²

Higginson's disdain notwithstanding, untold thousands of boys and girls read the periodical literature, novels, and schoolbooks inspired by the Civil War. Although it is probably true, as John Morton Blum suggested, that Civil War-era literature for children was "the incidental work of leading British and American authors, and the major work of some incidental writers of Victorian prose and poetry," that literature nonetheless provided a framework for living through those violent times. From these stories and editorials, games and illustrations, and adventures and parables, readers could piece together the conflict's causes and effects and discern how their own lives and futures fit into it. At the same time, readers were reminded of the age-old values that had been promoted in children's antebellum literature and would continue to appear in writing for children for many decades after the war. Joining them, however, were new values like bravery and patriotism – an aggressive, martial patriotism that would appear from time to time, whenever the United States faced external threats or flexed its growing power on the national stage.³³

Notes

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- 2 Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 75.
- 3 Sarah Law Kennerly, "Confederate Juvenile Imprints: Children's Books and Periodicals Published in the Confederate States of America, 1861–1865", PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1956, pp. 1–2, 55–180.
- 4 Col. Charles C. Nott, *Sketches of the War: A Series of Letters to the North Moore Street School of New York*, 4th ed. (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1865).
- 5 Charles Fosdick, *Frank on a Gun-boat* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1864), p. 129.
- 6 Oliver Optic, *The Soldier Boy; or, Tom Somers in the Army: Story of the Great Rebellion* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1863).
- 7 Gail Schmunk Murray, *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood* (New York: Twayne, 1998); Jane Goodwin Austin, *Dora Darling: The Daughter of the Regiment* (Boston: Tilton, 1865).

- 8 Edmund Kirke, "The Boy of Chancellorville," *Our Young Folks* 1 (Sept. 1865), 600–608.
- 9 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1868–1869); Horatio Alger, Jr., *Frank's Campaign; or, What Boys Can Do on the Farm for the Camp* (Boston: Loring, 1864).
- 10 Lydia Maria Child, "The Two Christmas Evenings," *Our Young Folks* 2 (Jan. 1866), 2–13.
- 11 Emily Huntington Miller, "The House that Johnny Rented," *Little Corporal* 1 (July 1865), 7–9; (Aug. 1865), 19–21; (Sept. 1865), 42–45.
- 12 Amanda M. Douglas, *Kathie's Soldiers* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1870); Mary G. Darling, *Battles at Home* (Boston: Horace B. Fuller, 1870), pp. 246–247.
- 13 MacLeod, *American Childhood*, p. 92; J. T. Trowbridge, "Turning of the Leaf," *Our Young Folks* 1 (June 1865), 399; *Merry's Museum* quoted in Patricia Ann Pflieger, "A Visit to Merry's Museum; or, Social Values in a Nineteenth-Century American Periodical for Children," PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1987, p. 190.
- 14 Christie Pearl, "The Contraband," *Student and Schoolmate* (Feb. 1862), 45–49; J. T. Trowbridge, *The Three Scouts* (Boston: Tilton, 1865).
- 15 "Jim Dick; or, the Best Revenge," *Forrester's Playmate* (May 1864), 45–46.
- 16 Murray, *American Children's Literature*, p. 143.
- 17 *For the Little Ones* (Savannah: John M. Cooper, n.d.), 32–33.
- 18 T. Michael Parrish and Robert W. Willingham, Jr., *Confederate Imprints: A Bibliography of Southern Publications from Secession to Surrender* (Austin: Jenkins, 1984), pp. 630–654.
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- 20 L. Johnson, *An Elementary Arithmetic, Designed for Beginners* (Raleigh: Branson and Farrar, 1864), pp. 121–122.
- 21 Rice, *System of Modern Geography*, pp. 21, 51, 85; M. B. Moore, *The Geographical Reader, for the Dixie Children* (Raleigh, NC: Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863), pp. 23, 33.
- 22 Gerald Norcross, *Diaries* (May 28, 1863; November 11 and December 24, 1864; February 24 and March 12, 1865), American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, MA).
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- 25 *The Freedman* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1864–1869), p. 15.

- 26 *The Freedman* (March 1865), p. 12.
- 27 Lydia Maria Child, *The Freedman's Book* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865).
- 28 Courtney Weikle-Mills, *Imaginary Citizens: Child Readers and the Limits of American Independence, 1640–1868* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).
- 29 Lady of Warrenton, Virginia, *The Princess of the Moon: A Confederate Fairy Story* (Warrenton, VA: n.p., 1869).
- 30 "Uncle Sam's Boys after the War," *Student and Schoolmate* (Dec. 1865), 152.
- 31 "Salutary," *Southern Boys and Girls' Monthly* (Jan. 1867), 1–2.
- 32 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Children's Books of the Year," *North American Review* 102 (Jan. 1866), 241–243.
- 33 John Morton Blum (ed.), *Yesterday's Children: An Anthology Compiled from the Pages of Our Young Folks, 1865–1873* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. xiii.

CHAPTER 9

Writing Lives: Civil War Diaries

Jane E. Schultz

When Walt Whitman famously proclaimed in *Specimen Days* that the “real war will never get in the books,” he had not envisioned how the extensive life writing produced in response to the Civil War would instantiate the abstraction of the real. He went on to speculate that the war’s “interior history will not only never be written – its practicality, minutiae of deeds and passions, will never be even suggested.”¹ Whitman implied that the collective personal experience of the war years was unrepresentable in language and that no single writer could enunciate what would always remain ineffable. But hundreds of published and unpublished diaries have challenged that pronouncement and created a national archive that reflects both the minutiae of lives and more sobering themes with which the war generation wrestled.

Sensing the historical “moment” that a civil war occasioned, soldiers, medical personnel, chaplains, farm women, well-heeled citizens, government clerks, officers’ wives, journalists, political figures, and Southern teenagers began to chronicle in earnest. Some wished to capture the heady days of social and political change for posterity, while others used the daily forum to make sense of the chaos unfolding around them. Although the diary has traditionally attracted writers with time to record the quotidian, it became a far more ecumenical genre during the Civil War. Diarists from both sections, female and male, civilian and military, rich and poor, told stories from the mundane to the poignant: of their families under emotional and economic stress; of their lives as infantrymen trying to survive illness and exposure; of their work to stoke the war machine with the riches of their larders; and as partisans justifying their ideological positions. Few gave thought to publishing their private musings, and hundreds of diaries that survived the war – even if begun long before it or continued long after it – have remained in U.S. repositories, unpublished to this day. Relatively few diarists offered up their chronicles during the war or immediately after it; those who did sought to capitalize

on a widespread hunger for personal testimony from camp and field. Confederate women were the most inveterate and numerous of the war's chroniclers but lacked access to publishers. An even more powerful deterrent was that few saw the interior mindscape of diary keeping as worthy of publication. The tide began to turn in the twentieth century, when diary editors and not the diarists themselves sought to challenge the triumphal narrative represented in Union accounts.

Throughout the modern era and long before the advent of digitization, historians unearthed and manually transcribed diaries, placing new primary sources before the public. Renewed scholarly interest in the genre's purity set off a popular movement to augment the growing archive: soldiers' and civilians' descendants gathered and published diaries that were treasured family heirlooms. Customarily printed at family members' expense, these sources offered the domestic testimony of ordinary people and of women in particular, complementing the elite or official perspectives of earlier publications.² Anticipating the war's centennial, war historiography turned toward the politics of slavery and Reconstruction, and diaries like that of Charlotte Forten, a free black who overcame racist opposition to teach for the Freedman's Bureau, became available to readers for the first time.³ Abiding questions about the war's meaning, reflected in Robert Penn Warren's centennial meditation *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961) and in Edmund Wilson's literary study *Patriotic Gore* (1962), also spurred the publication of diaries at midcentury. The most striking was George Templeton Strong's diary, kept from 1835 until Strong's death in 1875 and containing thousands of entries. A blue-blooded New Yorker, Strong was an attorney and an officer in the U.S. Sanitary Commission, whose top-down perspective on matters social and political affirmed his class privilege. A keen ironist, he observed one day after the firing on Fort Sumter: "John Brown would be worth his weight in gold just now. What a pity he precipitated matters and got himself prematurely hanged!"⁴

With the commemoration of the war's sesquicentennial from 2011 to 2015, a tidal wave of diaries has appeared in print and electronic formats. A twenty-first-century fascination with unreconstructed eyewitness testimonials and a quasi-religious reverence for Civil War memory have fueled the diary's renaissance. In the 1990s alone, 118 new diaries were published, more than at any time since the war began. Since 2000, 148 others have appeared.⁵ Prominent in this new generation are accounts of hospital life. As primary source material for a reappraisal of wartime medicine, we have diaries from Union and Confederate regimental surgeons and nurses as well as from other categories of medical workers: hospital stewards, citizen

volunteers, ambulance drivers, and chaplains. What these diaries lack aesthetically, they more than make up for in contributing to our understanding of soldiers' health care, which too often has been dismissed as butchery.

The recent surge in diary publication has also delivered primary texts by Americans otherwise underrepresented in the cumulative literary output of the war. Because the diary genre historically has been circumscribed by access to literacy, the known archive reflects few contributions by the socially marginal. Plantation daughters had the leisure to keep diaries, but domestics, field hands, and freedpeople, even if they were literate, had too little time. Despite considerable challenges, some prevailed and brought new selves into being through diary keeping. Christopher Hager's work to uncover the material processes of acquiring literacy suggests that African American participation in a culture of writers undergirded claims to citizenship.⁶ African American sailor William Gould's *Diary of a Contraband* provides a rare glimpse into maritime life by a fugitive slave. In September 1862, Gould and seven other bondsmen were rescued by a Union navy cutter as they fled from Wilmington, North Carolina. Gould enlisted and remained with the navy for three years, keeping a daily account of his activities. Surgeons advised Gould, when he was hospitalized with measles in 1863, to become a nurse during his convalescence. But he could not avoid the siren call of the sea: "There is nothing like the whistling wind and the dancing Bark on the Bounding Billow bearing its precious treasure to the shores of some distant clime," he mused.⁷ Twenty-five-year-old Emilie Davis, a free black Philadelphian, kept a pocket diary from New Year's Day 1863 through the end of 1865. Working as a seamstress and attending the Institute for Colored Youth, Davis made brief daily entries beginning with her reaction to news of the Emancipation Proclamation ("To day has bin a memorable day and i thank god i have bin sperd to see it"). The urban perspective of a young woman of color during the war is valuable, given the rarity of black-authored diaries. Davis's accounts of the battle of Gettysburg and the Lincoln assassination have brought into circulation a more racially complex picture of Northern home-front reactions.⁸

Wartime Diarists and Their Publications

The publishing boom that followed the war encouraged the production of memoirs and reminiscences, which overtook the diary in the nineteenth century as readers' genre of choice. But many who crafted such

narratives – from Confederate General Jubal Early to Quaker activist Abby Hopper Gibbons of New York – depended on diaries (and, where available, correspondence) to reconstruct their recollections.⁹ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Unitarian colonel of the Union's first black regiment, the 1st South Carolina, published a memoir in 1870, complete with chapters on "Negro Spirituals" and "The Baby of the Regiment." The letters and diary on which he based the narrative were not published until 2000.¹⁰ Armory Square nurse Amanda Akin Stearns used her diary as the basis for her 1909 memoir, *The Lady Nurse of Ward E*, censoring the original chronicle where she feared giving offense. Strike-throughs abound in the diary; an unsavory reference to "Mrs. Gov[ernor] Morgan," "a stout lady with plenty of diamonds" who is "not very interesting & a little pompous," does not appear in the memoir.¹¹ Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, which relief workers read to hospitalized patients, was a more candid, if fictionalized, recapitulation of the rookie nurse's diary covering six weeks of hospital service in Washington.¹² Alcott's jocular reportage, in which Dickensian nurse Tribulation Periwinkle juggles wounded Irishmen and black toddlers alike, shrouds a multitude of more vexed topics that war-weary readers might have eschewed and that publishers anxious to encourage sales wanted to avoid. Alcott's mid-war publication of a successful diary-driven narrative suggests the extent to which Union and Confederate audiences found value in eyewitness accounts. People at home wanted to know how their sons and husbands were faring in military camps and hospitals, and in the absence of timely communiqués from the War Department, they satisfied their curiosity by reading diary-like accounts.

Among the more popular mid-war testimonials were London *Times* correspondent William Howard Russell's *My Diary North and South* (1863), a ribald survey of politicians, soldiers, and spectators pronouncing contradictory opinions about the American conflict, and Arthur Fremantle's *Three Months in the Southern States* (1864). Son of a distinguished military family, the twenty-eight-year-old Briton traveled to Richmond and Gettysburg in 1863, where he watched one day of battle from a treetop. Rubbing elbows with generals, Confederate point men, and Jefferson Davis, Fremantle went north just as New York City exploded in drafts riots. Finding Northern racism easily as brutal as the frontier violence he had witnessed in Texas, Fremantle shipped back to England. No supporter of the slavocracy, he was nevertheless charmed by Southerners and did not imagine even after Gettysburg that their cause would fail.¹³ Diaries like Russell's and Fremantle's suggest the extent to which European politics and advocacy engaged a multinational readership.¹⁴

In the decade following the war, a variety of citizens – some jubilant in victory, others burdened by loss – hastened their stories to market. Although many were published as memoirs, some notable diaries also appeared. Early Confederate accounts were poignant reminders that sectional animus did not end at Appomattox. Frontier novelist and Southern sympathizer John Beauchamp Jones published *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary* (1866), an astute and at times graphic account of Richmond's (and Jones's own) declining fortunes. In the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, Jones produced novels about the escalating sectional crisis and edited the weekly *Southern Monitor*. From an office near Philadelphia, the Baltimore-born writer became a literary ambassador to the North, illuminating Southern grievances but opposing civil strife. Despite his counsel of peace, Jones fled to avoid reprisals when the war began and won a clerkship in the Confederate capital, where he detailed starvation and paper shortages and hurled criticism at political leaders.

Not so with Kate Cumming, Scottish-born Rebel and nurse in Samuel Stout's Confederate Army of Tennessee, who published her war diary in 1866 and lived long enough to bring out a revised edition in 1895.¹⁵ Unlike Jones, who had negotiated with Philadelphia's J. B. Lippincott, Cumming had no ties to Northern publishers. In desperate need of income to help support a household of ten, she was hard pressed to convince struggling Southern editors that a hospital diary would intrigue impecunious citizens who had just lived through the traumas that the diary recorded. Cumming borrowed \$400 when the Louisville house of John Morton agreed to print her account in 1866, but lacking professional encouragement, she was obliged to assume the burden of sales. Although arguably the most compelling account of wartime relief work ever produced, Cumming's *Journal of Hospital Life* (1866), with its heart-rending descriptions of soldiers dying for want of medical supplies, its criticism of Yankee and Rebel leaders alike, and its high-toned default to Confederate salvation, was a dismal failure in the market; she agonized for years about her inability to sell copies and to reimburse for the printing costs.¹⁶

The Gendered Genre

As a gendered genre, diary keeping has been the especial province of women, given their cultural assignment as guardians of private and domestic life. Elite Confederate women were the most prolific wartime diarists, providing insights into the plantation economy, refugee life, and the social intimacies of race relations, although precious few were inclined

to expose their innermost thoughts to the world through publication. Any discussion of the Confederate diary must begin with Mary Boykin Chesnut's epic account (about which readers will find a dedicated essay in this volume),¹⁷ revised and re-revised as a work of art and artfulness but never published during her lifetime, despite the accolades it has garnered since its first appearance in 1905 as "a diary from Dixie."¹⁸ Full of dramatic staging, incisive wit, and the Sturm und Drang of a dismantling way of life, Chesnut's palimpsestic oeuvre could be considered the literary equivalent of Confederate psyche. Sometimes labeled the greatest literary work of the war, it is worth noting that among diarists whose orbits were not so brilliant, she had many compatriots.

One of these was Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas. Like others in her class, Thomas dealt with the reversal of family fortunes and stooped to take a teaching job in the 1870s for \$30 a week. Even before the war, debt had begun to pile up. Thomas held her husband accountable; he appears to have been an alcoholic who borrowed large sums of money from family members. Although Thomas only alludes to it elliptically, his profligacy extended to fathering at least one child with a family slave.¹⁹ As mistress of substantial property in several counties of eastern Georgia, including scores of slaves, Thomas oversaw the care not only of her chattel but also of her eight children. Despite a dizzying array of domestic concerns, she managed to find time almost every day, sometimes multiple times per day, to chronicle all that transpired around her. At a half-million words, the diary is longer than Mary Chesnut's, and like Chesnut's, it is filled with searing insights governing the social, racial, and political toils of planter women's lives. Readers who immerse themselves in the full forty-year span of the diary will discover that Thomas, a devout Methodist, recognized the moral contradictions of slavery, yet rationalized her slaves' labor as freely given. Shocked when they left at war's end despite years of what passed for loyal service, Thomas confided with *schadenfreude* that they would trouble her no more. On 12 June 1865, after the house slaves learned that the end of the war meant the end of their bondage, she wrote: "I must confess to you my journal that I do most heartily dispise Yankees, Negroes and everything connected with them. . . . I positively instinctively shut my ears when I hear the hated subject mentioned and right gladly would I be willing never to place my eyes upon another as long as I live."²⁰ Such pronouncements did not stick, however, and Thomas's tone mellowed with age as she came to understand slaves' educational disadvantages. But she always regretted not being able to provide her children the start in life that she had enjoyed as a slaveholder.

Another who chronicled the ravages of war on Southern youth was Judith Brockenbrough McGuire, who, like Kate Cumming, self-published her postwar *Diary of a Southern Refugee* (1867). Originally from Alexandria, the McGuires settled in Richmond in 1862, where they could scarcely meet the spiraling costs of food, clothing, and shelter. For the duration of the war, the diarist clerked in the army commissary department and took daily note of life's rhythms in the Confederate capital. When the officer son of close friends died in 1864, she lamented, "Thus we bury, one by one, the dearest, the brightest, the best of our domestic circles. . . . These separations are poignant, nay, overwhelming; but how can we estimate the sadness of heart which will pervade the South when the war is over, and we are again gathered together around our family hearths and altars, and find the circles broken?"²¹ The social dislocations of refugees were terrible; the loss of future sociality worse.

Dolorous sentiments became the lingua franca of the Confederate gentry, especially as customary privilege declined and women used to more elegant living resorted to wage earning. Emma Holmes of Charleston found work as a teacher and governess to help her widowed mother supplement the income of their large household. Just twenty-two at the start of the war, Holmes passionately denounced all things Yankee. When she learned in May 1862 of Union General Benjamin Butler's notorious proclamation concerning the women of New Orleans, she breathed fire: "Beauregard had [the orders] read at the head of his army and it has everywhere roused the Southerners to a deadlier hatred and made them grasp their weapons with a fiercer determination to sweep such fiends from our beloved country." Fury mixed with disappointment was even more toxic at war's end. With the armistice at hand, she scribbled, "To go back into the Union!!! No words can describe all the horrors contained in those few words."²² Holmes stopped writing in April 1866 but remained an unreconstructed Rebel, never marrying and never acknowledging Confederate defeat.

Several Confederate diaries are noteworthy for the precision of their descriptions about depredations, such as those of Dolly Lunt Burge and Emma LeConte, who record losses on their homesteads during Sherman's incendiary march. Although only seventeen at the time, LeConte provides one of the most meticulous accounts of the firing of Columbia, South Carolina, in February 1865 – an event memorialized in Eudora Welty's "The Burning."²³ Cornelia Peake McDonald's *Diary with Reminiscences of the War* (1935) chronicles McDonald's fruitless attempts to protect her eight children and six slaves from Yankee visitations and nearby shelling on her

Winchester farm, while husband Angus was tending to military business. Subjected to bombardment on a June morning in 1863, McDonald wrote:

We sat together in the dining room before the windows looking to the West. . . . We . . . could see the troops deploying, skirmish lines thrown forward and mounted men galloping from one point to another, batteries wheeling into position, and every now and then the thunder of cannon and the shriek of shell. . . . [A] shell came crashing through the trees near the house, and reminded us that we were in danger. Thick and fast they presently came, one after another. . . . We are just in their path. . . . We hold our breath and cover our eyes till they pass. I gather all the children in till the firing ceases.²⁴

Site of a military tug-of-war, Winchester changed hands more than seventy times from 1861 to 1865, wreaking havoc on the McDonalds' domestic felicity and finally driving them into the Virginia outback.²⁵

An army of Southern teenagers also began diaries during the war that were less somber, if more histrionic, in their tone. At sixteen, Clara Solomon observed the transformation of New Orleans from a Southern capital with eighteenth-century European roots to a Union-held garrison town in the grip of cloddish officers. From June 1861 to July 1862, Solomon, one of six daughters of a Sephardic Jewish merchant, wrote lengthy entries castigating the vandal horde, including one on 8 May 1862, where Solomon's disgust at the downtown street scene was visceral:

The Square is still occupied by [soldiers] & there are a few remaining tents there. But the St. Charles [Hotel]! My heart sank within me when I beheld it. . . . It looks to be a perfect wreck. They are loitering around it, lying down, playing cards, & their clothes hanging around [*sic*]. Oh! it was a loathsome sight. . . . [Soldiers] are strutting along with such an air of defiance as I never saw, so scornful, so unassuming.²⁶

A repository of affect and emotion, the Solomon diary is notable both for its depiction of the Big Easy in wartime and its representation of Jewish culture in the South.²⁷ Ellen Renshaw House's diary, *A Very Violent Rebel* (1996), is a compendium of Confederate-Unionist unrest in east Tennessee during the war. Like other passionate twenty-year-old girls with plenty of time on their hands, House advocated Confederate vigilantism and cheered Lincoln's assassination in 1865.²⁸ Youthful diarists commented on everything from "beau-hunting" to Sherman's March; eighteen-year-old Kate Stone's journal of Louisiana plantation and refugee life provides a striking portrait of girlhood expectations run amok.²⁹ Stone contended with the death of two brothers in the Confederate service and with the

physical grit of life on the road, where she detested being in close quarters with family slaves. From Brokenburn, their unlikely named cotton plantation near Vicksburg, the Stones and their 150 chattel caravanned to Lamar County, Texas, hoping to retain some semblance of social decorum but finding in the “ugly, rough,” unfashionable people of their adopted home little inspiration.³⁰ Instead they sought out other refugees for society.

Although Confederate women significantly outnumbered noncombatant Confederate men as keepers of diaries, those too old to fight or rich enough to buy their way out of soldiering sometimes wielded the pen. Confederate icon Edmund Ruffin left a diary of Southern hope and disappointment from his base in Tidewater, Virginia. At sixty-seven, the cavalierly figure with white, shoulder-length hair had advocated for secession on the basis of the belief that the South’s agricultural potential could only be realized with substantial slave labor. The diary, which begins on a high note in 1861 with the establishment of the Confederate nation, becomes increasingly shrill as the government goes broke. Ruffin held politicians responsible for the defeat, and despite having been perhaps Dixie’s most vociferous cheerleader, he shot himself to death two months after the Confederacy fell.³¹ One-term governor and U.S. senator from South Carolina, James Henry Hammond, took center stage in the sectional debates that led to disunion. Best known for the “mudsill” theory of class, which argued that every economy depended on good-natured drudges to do unsavory manual labor and that African Americans had answered Southern landowners’ need of cotton harvesters, Hammond kept a diary that provided insights into the habits of powerful men. Scion of immense plantations worked by more than 300 slaves, the New England-born Hammond gained his wealth through marriage but enacted the *droit du seigneur* with slaves as young as twelve, a bevy of teenage nieces, and even young men. Arguably paranoid in his political dealings, Hammond used his “secret and sacred” diaries not only as a canvas for his sexual exploits but also as a means to portray himself as more sinned against than sinning.³²

Soldier Diaries

Diaries of Union and Confederate soldiers have appeared regularly since mid-war as an offshoot of conventional diary keeping: mothers and wives sent menfolk to war carrying pocket journals with the charge to record events, both personal and national. Regiments appointed historians to chronicle their progress. Although some accounts were published as narrative homages to regimental achievement, others appeared in their original

form, as diaries, such as Joseph W. Grant's journal of the campaigns of the 12th Rhode Island Infantry, *The Flying Regiment* (1865), or John Williams's *Leaves from a Trooper's Diary* (1869). Since 1980, an emphasis on the interior lives of common soldiers, a subject explored by Michael Barton, Reid Mitchell, James McPherson, and others has spurred publication of military diaries.³³ Given nineteenth-century immigration patterns to the United States, not all diarists wrote in English. German-born Americans were the largest nonnative group to serve; more than 200,000 belonged to German-speaking regiments like the 74th Pennsylvania and 32nd Indiana. Michael Zimmer, who began chronicling his service in the Mexican War, detailed his life as a private in the 9th Wisconsin from September 1861 through November 1864. His *Ein Deutsches Tagebuch aus dem Amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg* recounts troop movements and weather conditions but also glimpses Osage, Cherokee, and Shawnee soldiers drilling in a Kansas regiment: Wrote Zimmer, "Es war zu trollich um alles zu beschreiben" ("It was too funny to describe everything"). A more sobering passage concerns the suicide of a fifty-one-year-old infantryman who tried to end his life with a penknife, razor, and bayonet before finally succeeding with his musket.³⁴

While many diarists negotiated the Scylla of unstructured time in camp with the Charybdis of infrequent combat, a few regaled readers with their remarkable exploits. Charles Hopkins, a harness maker serving in the 1st New Jersey, began a diary in May 1864 before his capture at the Battle of the Wilderness. After two weeks of forced marching and the occasional boxcar ride from Virginia to Andersonville, Georgia – a distance of 600 miles – Hopkins and those who survived the journey became denizens of the infamous stockade. Attempting three escapes during his four months there, Hopkins was tortured but lived to tell because, as he confided, he would not give the Rebels the satisfaction of giving up.³⁵ Nearly as rare as a Confederate prison diary – but no less brutal – was the account of James Ayers, a fifty-seven-year-old Kentuckian appointed to recruit black soldiers after his enlistment in an Illinois regiment. An imposing figure, Ayers traveled into Confederate territory late in 1863, informing slaves that they were now free and could leave their plantations. During one sojourn to Huntsville, Ayers reported his conversation with disbelieving field hands and their uncooperative master. Pulling a gun on the latter, Ayers persuaded by threat: "I have come for your Darkeys and your Darkeys I'll have."³⁶ A record of border state sensibilities, the diary juxtaposed ex-slaves' eagerness to serve the Union with pungent commentary about their racial inferiority.

Like their blue-coated counterparts, Rebel soldiers also kept diaries in the field. John Jackman joined the 9th Kentucky, part of the Orphan Brigade, and served all four years of the conflict. Initially supported by 4,000 men, the Brigade numbered only 600 at war's end after seeing hard action in both theaters. Jackman made a transcript of the diary in 1865 in which he added contextual description while studying the law. Jackman's diary features hand-drawn maps of his brigade's skirmishes en route to Atlanta in May 1864. What sets the diary apart as a literary artifact is Jackman's clarity about time: he tells readers whether he is writing in the moment or from near-memory of recent battles. For example, wounded by a shell fragment at Pine Mountain, Georgia, on 14 June 1864, Jackman, understandably indisposed, stated, "I did not write any more in my journal for nearly three months," but gave readers an account of his hospitalization.³⁷

Medical Accounts in Full View

Contemporary discourses about bodies and the state have injected interest in diaries that reflect the health care of Civil War soldiers. Kept primarily by surgeons and relief workers, some of the most compelling accounts have surprisingly little to do with medicine, instead illuminating caregivers' stories about patients and bedside interactions. Female nurses began to publish hospital narratives by mid-war and did so throughout the nineteenth century. Most of these were memoirs, however, including one published anonymously from a Philadelphia hospital in 1864.³⁸ Published war-period nursing diaries, like Kate Cumming's, are relatively rare; bans on public displays of any sort kept many writers in the shadows until the twentieth century when editors published them for the first time. One of these was South Carolinian Ada Bacot, whose diary was not published until 1994. In her mid-twenties when she lost her husband and two toddlers, Bacot dedicated herself on the medical altar of the Confederacy. Unusual for a slaveholder, she left home to join the Midway Hospital staff in Charlottesville, Virginia, where she sparred with a younger colleague, flirted with a married surgeon, and resorted to religious expostulations when moral persuasion did not avail.³⁹

Union nursing diaries similarly highlight the importance of women's connection to patients and their self-appointed role as moral guardians. Massachusetts abolitionist Hannah Ropes kept an account of her travails as head nurse at Union Hotel Hospital, where she supervised the young Alcott. Ropes, who ultimately contracted typhoid and died early in 1863,

wrote unsparingly about surgical staff corruption that included graft, theft, and blackmail. Esther Hill Hawks's diary provides a window on the celebrated African Americans of the 54th Massachusetts, whom Hawks nursed after their July 1863 assault on Fort Wagner. An aspiring physician, the New Hampshire native brought medical knowledge to her work, convinced that white surgeons had little interest in wounded men of color. A third New Englander whose diary and letters were recently published is Maine's Harriet Eaton of Portland, who left two young daughters at home to attend to men in the Virginia countryside. Like Bacot, Eaton was widowed and deeply religious, constantly urging herself to bear the trials of her assignment through evangelical appeals. Eaton famously fell out with coworker Isabella Fogg, dispelling the portrait of angelic nurses that circulated in reconstructed postwar memoirs. Her unconventional criticisms of the U. S. Sanitary Commission indicate the mistrust that many state-sponsored relief workers held for the federal government, even in the North.⁴⁰

As a body of texts, surgical diaries are less apt to cover social interaction and more likely to record the scientific detail of military-medical operations. In the past twenty years alone, ten new surgical diaries have been published in contrast to only two published before that time – one in 1863 and the other in 1939.⁴¹ The reasons for the dearth are unclear. It is possible that diary-keeping surgeons simply found the practice of medicine more engaging than the publication of the raw sentiments that constituted their journals. Given the sizable number of postwar medical memoirs – some, like John Brinton's, published as late as 1914 – it is likely that the controversy surrounding ineffective treatments before antisepsis was widely practiced and that led to high mortality discouraged surgeons from fully opening their black bags. But we are fortunate to have Bostonian Burt Wilder's diary of his life as regimental surgeon of the 55th Massachusetts, which, like the more famous 54th, was made up of black soldiers and white officers. Despite Wilder's developing bonds with his charges, he felt unequal to the task of practicing medicine. He not only had to overcome his "natural repugnance" to the profession but also was "often and painfully conscious of [his] lack of regular medical training." In time and with an abundance of bodies to look after, he "realize[d] what an opportunity [his service] offer[ed] for usefulness, for helping others not only physically but morally, and for cheering the despondent."⁴²

Educated in Maine, J. Franklin Dyer apprenticed with a Boston physician in the 1840s and was appointed surgeon of the 19th Massachusetts in July 1861. In three years of service, the medical experience he brought

to the front got him promoted to chief surgeon of the Second Division of the II Army Corps. Dyer's acumen is revealed in the twenty-six case reports he successfully submitted to the *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*, the behemoth postwar publication covering Union medical practice. He was also instrumental in getting the Army Medical Department to acknowledge epidemic scurvy among the troops. Like other highly placed surgeons, he frowned on civilian volunteers, especially women, criticizing their do-gooder mentality. Of Clara Barton, whom he observed at Fredericksburg in 1862 but who had recently traveled south to Charleston harbor, site of a Union medical facility, he railed: "I hope she will stay there, or not come here. She plagued me so [at Fredericksburg] that I had to get her out of the cook house and put one of my own men in charge!"⁴³ The diary and letters of Daniel Holt provide a different sort of record. Holt was a country doctor who, at forty-two, was appointed assistant surgeon of the 121st New York. Not an elite member of the medical establishment, Holt felt overlooked by his peers, given his years of experience and his superior result on the state medical exam ("Kissing goes by favor, and not being one of that kind, I shall not get [promoted]"). After the battle of Antietam, where wounded soldiers would die of exposure for lack of tents, Holt was astonished by his growing callousness:

I cannot describe, neither can I realize what we have passed through.... Had anyone told me a year ago that I could look upon such horrors and feel no mental disturbances, I should not have believed them. Yet so it is. I pass over the putrefying bodies of the dead ... and feel as little unconcerned as though they were two hundred pigs.⁴⁴

At odds with a tippling assistant surgeon and the chief surgeon who avoided surgery, Holt thought of resigning but endured until October 1864, having been present for most of the Army of the Potomac's fiercest fighting. His service took a toll not only on his physical health but also on his diary keeping, which diminished by late war.

Any retrospective on the Civil War diary as a literary form and an historical document must of necessity exclude signal contributions to the archive. But taken together, the diaries referenced here or not, diaries published and those still unpublished, constitute one of the Civil War's greatest literary legacies. The availability of sources that reconstruct the daily lives of ordinary people living through extraordinary times and the multitude of prose styles representing witnesses of all walks of nineteenth-century American life have deepened readers' appreciation for the ambiguities, alliances, and enmities that drove this most uncivil of wars.

Notes

- 1 Walt Whitman, "Specimen Days" in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, Justin Kaplan (ed.) (New York: Library of America, 1982), p. 779.
- 2 See, for example, *The Civil War Journals of Paulena Stevens Janney* (n.p.: 2007); and *The Civil War Letters and Diary of Jesse Kieffer*, Jeanne and Craig Kieffer (eds.) (n.p.: 2000).
- 3 *The Journal of Charlotte Forten, a Free Negro in the Slave Era*, Ray Billington (ed.) (New York: Norton, 1981), first published in 1953.
- 4 George Templeton Strong, *Diary of the Civil War, 1860–1865*, Allan Nevins (ed.) (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 13 April 1861.
- 5 See the Library of Congress online catalogue. These data do not include memoirs, letter collections, diary anthologies, regimental accounts, or diary editions published before 1990.
- 6 See Hager's account of John Washington in *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 83–91.
- 7 William Benjamin Gould, *Diary of a Contraband: The Civil War Passage of a Black Sailor*, William Benjamin Gould, IV (ed.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 143.
- 8 Emilie Frances Davis, *Emilie Davis's Civil War: The Diaries of a Free Black Woman in Philadelphia, 1863–1865*, Judith Giesberg (ed.) (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), p. 1.
- 9 See Jubal A. Early, *Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence, in the Confederate States of America* (New Orleans, LA: Blelock, 1867); and *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons Told Chiefly Through Her Correspondence*, Sarah Hopper Emerson (ed.) (New York: Putnam's, 1896–1897).
- 10 See Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1870); and *The Complete Civil War Journals and Selected Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson*, Christopher Looby (ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- 11 See Stearns's diary fragment, 20 May 1864, National Library of Medicine, Washington, DC; and Stearns, *The Lady Nurse of Ward E* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1909).
- 12 Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (Boston: Redpath, 1863); and Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (eds.), *Journals of Louisa May Alcott* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989). Stearns received *Hospital Sketches* from a coworker on 26 Nov 1863, read it, and passed it to Surgeon Smith on 8 Dec. 1863. On 6 Dec., she mentions reading it to her patients. See *The Lady Nurse of Ward E*, pp. 92, 105, and 102.
- 13 See *Fremantle Diary, Being the Journal of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur James Lyon Fremantle*, Walter Lord (ed.) (Short Hills, NJ: Burford Books, 2001). Reprint of 1954 edition.
- 14 British journalist George Sala's *My Diary in America in the Midst of War* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1865) and Henry Yates Thompson's 1863 diary, *An*

- Englishman in the American Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1971) contribute to this subgenre.
- 15 Cumming's *Gleanings from Southland* (Birmingham: Roberts, 1895) was a sanitized version of the original, influenced by Jim Crow politics.
 - 16 Cumming's diary and letters beyond 1865 reveal her ill-starred venture in self-publishing. See Cumming Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.
 - 17 See Julia Stern's *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), which argues that Chesnut constructed an epic from the diary.
 - 18 See Isabella Martin's and Myrta Lockett Avery's abridged version of Chesnut's diary, *A Diary from Dixie* (New York: D. Appleton, 1905).
 - 19 Nell Painter speculates that Thomas's references to "competition" conceal what must have been her husband's infidelity. See *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848–1889*, Virginia Ingraham Burr (ed.) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 55–63.
 - 20 *The Secret Eye*, p. 275.
 - 21 Judith Brockenbrough McGuire, *Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War by a Lady of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph and English, 1889), 1 Jan. 1864, p. 249.
 - 22 *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, John Marszalek (ed.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp. 165, 436. When rumors of Confederate women spitting on Union officers circulated, Butler proclaimed that any woman found in the street would be considered a common harlot.
 - 23 See Dolly Lunt Burge, *A Woman's Wartime Journal*, Julian Street (ed.) (New York: Century, 1918); and *When the World Ended: The Diary of Emma LeConte*, Earl Schenck Miers (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957). Wely's 1951 story was published in *Harper's Bazaar*.
 - 24 Cornelia Peake McDonald, *A Woman's Civil War: A Diary with Reminiscences of the War*, Minrose Gwin (ed.) (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp. 155–156.
 - 25 See also Sheila Phipps, *Genteel Rebel: The Life of Mary Greenhow Lee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); and *Journal of a Secesh Lady: The Diary of Catherine Devereux Edmondston*, Beth Crabtree and James Patton (eds.) (Raleigh: Virginia Division of Archives and History, 1979). Edmondston complains of family disunity and racial turmoil on her tobacco plantations but says surprisingly little about blue-coated acts of vandalism.
 - 26 *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans*, Elliott Ashkenazi (ed.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), p. 355.
 - 27 Other Louisiana accounts include *The Journal of Julia LeGrand*, Kate Mason Rowland and Morris L. Croxall (eds.) (Richmond, VA: Everett Waddey, 1911); and Sarah Morgan's *A Confederate Girl's Diary* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913).
 - 28 *A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House*, Daniel Sutherland (ed.) (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), p. 190.

- 29 See also Anna Green's *Journal of a Milledgeville Girl*, James C. Bonner (ed.) (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964); Eliza Frances Andrews's *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl* (New York: D. Appleton, 1908); and Lucy Buck's *Sad Earth, Sweet Heaven* (Birmingham, AL: Cornerstone, 1973).
- 30 *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861–1868*, John Q. Anderson (ed.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), p. 226.
- 31 *Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, William Scarborough (ed.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972).
- 32 *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder*, Carol Bleser (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Hammond kept the diary from 1841 to 1864.
- 33 See Michael Barton, *Goodmen, the Character of Civil War Soldiers* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); and James McPherson, *What They Fought for, 1861–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).
- 34 *Michael Zimmer's Diary*, Jürgen Macha and Andrea Wolf (trans.) (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 22, 130.
- 35 See *The Andersonville Diary and Memoirs of Charles Hopkins*, William Styple and John Fitzpatrick (eds.) (Kearny, NJ: Belle Grove, 1988).
- 36 *Diary of James T. Ayers, Civil War Recruiter*, John Hope Franklin and John David Smith (eds.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), p. 30. Reprint of 1947 edition.
- 37 See *Diary of a Confederate Soldier: John S. Jackman of the Orphan Brigade*, William C. Davis (ed.) (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 6, 68, 119, 122, 123, 131, 137, 141. The diary of Richmond-born attorney Alfred Peticolas, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*, Don E. Alberts (ed.) (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), featured sketches of the war in the Southwest.
- 38 See Julia Dunlap's anonymously published *Notes of Hospital Life* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1864).
- 39 See *A Confederate Nurse: The Diary of Ada W. Bacot, 1860–1863*, Jean Berlin (ed.) (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).
- 40 See *Civil War Nurse: The Diary and Letters of Hannah Ropes*, John R. Brumgardt (ed.) (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980); *A Woman Doctor's Civil War: Esther Hill Hawks' Diary*, Gerald Schwartz (ed.) (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1984); and *This Birth Place of Souls: The Civil War Nursing Diary of Harriet Eaton*, Jane E. Schultz (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 41 My count does not include memoirs, recollections, letter collections, or biographies. The earliest was published by Thomas Ellis, a British-born physician who served on Staten Island in 1861 and recorded his struggle to manage drunken and disorderly recruits. See *Leaves from the Diary of an Army Surgeon* (New York: John Bradburn, 1863), pp. 16, 24–25. The 1939 diary was Surgeon Elijah Burton's of the 7th Illinois Infantry.

- 42 *Practicing Medicine in a Black Regiment: The Civil War Diary of Burt G. Wilder*, Richard Reid (ed.) (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), p. 82.
- 43 *J. Franklin Dyer, The Journal of a Civil War Surgeon*, Michael Chesson (ed.) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. xxiv.
- 44 *A Surgeon's Civil War: The Letters and Diary of Daniel M. Holt, MD*, James Greiner, Janet Coryell, and James Smither (eds.) (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), pp. 80, 21.

CHAPTER 10

Civil War Memoir

Sarah E. Gardner

Mary A. H. Gay opened her Civil War memoir, *Life in Dixie During the War*, with a declaration and a call to arms. "I have long felt that it was the duty of the South to bequeath to posterity" a record of the antebellum and Confederate past, she wrote, "for if we do it not ourselves they will be swallowed up in oblivion." "Entering this opinion," she continued, "I have essayed the task of an individual effort, and hope that others will follow my example." Her remarks acknowledge the democratic appeal of memoir. Perhaps more than any other genre, memoir offered combatants and noncombatants, common foot soldiers and generals, and pawns and power brokers, the opportunity to shape postwar memory of the nation's most cataclysmic event. A memoirist did not require formal training, Gay implied. Nor was access to the postwar reading audience reserved only for those who played particular roles in the conflict. For Gay and countless others, a memoirist need only to have lived through the bloody conflict to have something important to say. The proliferation of Civil War memoirs that appeared on the literary market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggests that publishing firms and readers agreed.¹

Gay's comments point to more than the universal appeal of memoir, however. By 1892, when Gay published *Life in Dixie During the War*, the battle to direct the ways the war was remembered had intensified. Civil War memory influenced not only cultural production in the first five decades following Confederate defeat but also social and public policy. Put another way, the culturally sanctioned memory of the past helped chart the future direction of the nation.

And every voice was needed. To underscore that point, Gay enlisted the help of her fellow former Confederates to lift their pens for the cause. General William T. Sherman also called on his friends (and enemies) to offer their impressions, although his appeal was more belligerent than that of Gay. "In this free country," he blustered in the preface to the second edition of his memoirs, "every man is at perfect liberty to publish

his own thoughts and impressions, and any witness who may differ from me should publish his own version of facts in the truthful narration of which he is interested." Well before the "documentary impulse" of the 1930s, then, Union and Confederate partisans understood the importance of individual voices to the crafting of a postwar understanding of the war's causes and legacies. As Union General Joshua L. Chamberlain explained in his memoir, *The Passing of Armies*, the war's participants and witnesses offered something that mere chroniclers could not. "History is written for the most part from the outside," he observed. "Truth often suffers distortion by reason of the point of view of the narrator," he continued, "some preoccupation of his judgment or fancy as to relative merits but even as to facts in their real relations." Memoirists might labor under similar biases, he conceded, but they are to be excused. An "interior view," he held, "must be of interest, especially in important transactions, to know how things appeared to those actually engaged in them."²

That said, not all voices were equally valid. Even in the reconciliationist mood of the post-Reconstruction era, memoirists marshaled their experiences to advance particular arguments that not all could share. Some, like former slave Susie King Taylor, countered the dominant postwar narrative that erased the emancipatory legacy of the war to promote sectional reconciliation. In the only Civil War memoir published by an African American woman, Taylor described the bravery, dedication, and skill with which African American soldiers fought simultaneously for the Union and their own freedom. For the next thirty years, Taylor witnessed the erasure of black freedom from the nation's memory of the war. She rhetorically asked, "Was the war in vain?" Although the answer was apparent, she nevertheless catalogued the ways in which the nation had betrayed the emancipatory achievements of the war. "In this 'land of the free,'" she accused, African Americans "are burned, tortured, and denied a fair trial, murdered for any imaginary wrong conceived in the brain of the negro-hating white man." "There is no redress for us," she concluded "from a government which promised to protect all under its flag." Taylor's reminiscences reminded readers of the profound implications of sacrificing the rights of African Americans on the altar of reunion.³

Others, like former Confederate Generals John B. Gordon and James Longstreet, sought to resuscitate the reputation of those to whom "history" had not been kind. "If I speak with some particularity of the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia," Longstreet wrote in 1896, "it must be ascribed in part to the affection of a commander, and in part to my desire to relieve its brave officers and men in the ranks from unjust

aspersions." Longstreet was less concerned with northern accounts of General Robert E. Lee's Army than he was with "various writers on the Southern cause" who held Lee and his men responsible for Confederate defeat. At the time of the publication of Gordon's and Longstreet's memoirs, the myth of the lost cause, which elevated Lee to god-like status, was in its ascendancy. The canonization of Lee required the scapegoating of his subordinates to explain his army's loss at Gettysburg. Longstreet, who was charged with being "culpably slow," was the low-hanging fruit. Longstreet defended himself by quoting Lee's admission, "It's all my fault." Moreover, he and Lee had maintained "the kindest relations" after the war. Longstreet thus found it difficult to reconcile these "facts" with those reports issued by members of Lee's staff that claimed Lee had tried to deflect blame by foisting it on Longstreet. Lee's sense of honor, Longstreet maintained, did not permit him "to lose a battle and a cause and then lay the responsibility on others." Gordon remained unpersuaded. Writing seven years after Longstreet, he noted that his former comrade in arms was "undoubtedly among the great American soldiers who attained distinction in our Civil War." And although he professed his profound regret that Longstreet "should be brought in such unprofitable and ill-tempered controversy," he nonetheless laid the loss at Gettysburg at Longstreet's feet. "General Lee died believing (the testimony on this point is overwhelming) that he lost Gettysburg at last by Longstreet's disobedience of orders," he wrote emphatically. The internal battle continued to rage, in part because Gordon and Longstreet had marshaled their memoirs in the fight.⁴

Despite the multiplicity of voices and motives, Civil War memoirs shared certain elements and conventions, making it possible to speak of a distinct genre of American prose. Memoirists aided a cause, whether it be partisan (as with Confederates such as spy Belle Boyd or General Jubal A. Early), reconciliationist (as with scores of former Unionists and Confederates who entered the literary market in the post-Reconstruction era), or merely the cause of "history." Indeed, memoirists believed they contributed to the national record of the war. Imagining the decades it would take the U.S. War Department to make public the official records of the war, Sherman offered his memoir as an aid to the future historian "when he comes to describe the whole, and account for the motives and reasons which influenced some of the actors in the grand drama of war."⁵ Gordon, too, regarded his memoirs as a source to be consulted by a later generation. Memoirists, then, did not merely pen interesting anecdotes or colorful stories of days gone by. Responding to a postwar collective need

to understand America's crossroad, they sought to set the record straight. Significantly, none thought that he or she had the final word.⁶

Before the Romance

As David Blight has observed, "time was necessary for reminiscence to be culturally salable, or even psychologically necessary."⁷ For most veterans, regardless of sectional or political affiliation, the need to forget the physical and psychological trauma of war was imperative. War had traumatized noncombatants as well. Soldiers' initial reluctance to write about the war, coupled with publishers' skittishness about postwar audiences, delayed for more than a decade the publication of Civil War memoirs that would later dominate the literary landscape. Yet not all were prepared to jettison their wartime experiences into "oblivion." These veterans faced a different imperative altogether – namely, the need to continue the war by other means. Two Confederate memoirs that appeared in the months immediately following Confederate surrender help illustrate this point.⁸

Confederate spy Belle Boyd drafted her memoir in the late months of the war while she was in exile in England. Although she had clearly flouted gender norms during the war, her memoir conformed to the gendered literary conventions of the Victorian era. *Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison* carried the imprimatur of George Sala, a London publisher and Confederate sympathizer who framed Boyd's account in socially acceptable terms. According to Sala, Boyd granted him the authority to dispose of her manuscript at his discretion. "Take this," she directed. "[R]ead it, revise it, rewrite it, publish it, or burn it – do what you will." Sala's introduction intimates that Boyd well understood the rules of the game. She suggested that he render her account in the third person, thus making the book palatable to a middle-class reading audience, and thus profitable for Boyd. Although Sala claimed to have made few revisions to Boyd's manuscript, he complied with Boyd's wish for her memoir to conform to readerly expectations. He played up Boyd's impoverished and isolated condition in London, suggesting her need of a male protector, a role ably played by Sala. He emphasized her guileless youth and naiveté, suggesting that her unorthodox behavior in the war merely expressed the purest and most sincere expression of patriotism. Finally, Sala presented Boyd "to the kindly sympathy of her readers" not as an author, partisan soldier, or freed prisoner of war but "simply as a woman – a warm-hearted, impulsive, heroic woman of the South, who, maddened by the cruelties inflicted on her people and exalted, by the love she bore them, above the common

cares and considerations of life, dashed into the field, bearing more than a woman's part in her country's struggle for liberty." Boyd could hardly have wished for a better introduction to a British reading audience.⁹

Boyd's actual memoir certainly continued in this vein. Disclaiming any interest in "woman's rights," she chose to present herself "in the character of a quiet lady expressing her sentiments not so much to the public as to her immediate friends." She thus followed the convention of Victorian women writers, assuming a familiarity with her audience. Boyd kept her imagined readers at the forefront of her memoir, directly appealing to their sympathies throughout. Boyd invited her readers to share her sense of outrage and displacement: "[W]hat would be their own feelings if, far and wide throughout their country, the ancestral hall, the farmer's homestead, and the laborer's cot were giving shelter to the licentious soldiers of an invader or crackling in incendiary flames." As she drafted her memoir, Boyd continued to hold out hope of British recognition of the Confederacy. Because the war ended as Boyd's memoir was in its final stages of production, however, she needed to make a final appeal to her readers, one that asked not for intercession on the Confederacy's behalf but rather a common understanding of history. Boyd claimed to have accepted the meaning of Confederate defeat: "I firmly believe that in this fiery ordeal, in this suffering, misery, and woe, the South is but undergoing a purification by fire and steel that will, in good time, and by His decree, work out its own aim." Boyd's final appeal, then, asked her readers to maintain the sympathy that she had worked hard to cultivate throughout her narrative, especially in the wake of Confederate defeat. Providence, she pronounced, will prove the Confederate's cause just.¹⁰

Boyd, despite her own efforts, was a marginal figure. The most influential of these early Confederate memoirists, General Jubal A. Early, published the first memoir written by a major Civil War figure, Confederate or Unionist, and thus helped define the genre. As with most memoirists, Early saw himself as writing for posterity. Unionists, he claimed, had "flooded the press with sketches and histories" that advanced a decidedly one-sided and erroneous accounting of events. Worse yet, his own compatriots had, in an effort to explain defeat, "engaged in carping criticisms" against the Confederacy's military and political leaders. These noncombatants, Early stinging rebuked, "imagined that the distinctiveness of their vision was enhanced by the distance from the scene of conflict, and an exemption from the disturbing elements of whistling bullets and bursting shells." Early thus offered his *Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence in the Confederate States of America* as a corrective. As a

participant and witness “in great events,” Early hoped his narrative would aid future historians.¹¹

To this end, he annotated his manuscript with detailed explanatory notes that countered postwar reports filed by General Ulysses S. Grant and Union Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. In particular, his notes reveal his preoccupation with inflated estimates of Confederate forces that tended to magnify Union victories. Early wished to emphasize the tremendous odds against which the Confederacy fought. “I believe that the world has never produced a body of men superior, in courage, patriotism, and endurance, to the private soldiers of the Confederate armies,” he wrote in his preface. “I have repeatedly seen those soldiers submit, with cheerfulness, to privations and hardships which would appear to be almost incredible.” Evoking the chivalric tradition so popular with antebellum readers, Early recounted his having seen “with my own eyes, ragged, barefooted, and hungry Confederate soldiers perform deeds, which, if performed in days of yore by mailed warriors in glittering armor, would have inspired the harp of the minstrel and the pen of the poet.” His memoir thus celebrates the common soldier, who, because of valor, steadfastness, and bravado in the face of a numerically superior foe, has equaled the heroes of legend. But none of those qualities, his memoir underscores, was enough to secure Confederate victory.¹²

Because Early put these discussions in service to a larger argument about the historical record, he did not view his commentary as scurrilous or defamatory. In fact, in what became a standard rhetorical strategy employed by many memoirists, Early disclaimed any interest in disparaging the character of others to aggrandize his own reputation. “My operations and my campaign stand on their own merits,” he asserted, “whatever they may be.” Like others, he sought to avoid accusations of excessive pride and self-interest. For Early, however, much was at stake. His disastrous defeat in the Shenandoah Valley at the Battle of Waynesboro in the spring of 1865 earned him the contempt of his fellow officers and his dismissal from active duty. As historian Gary Gallagher has observed, Early became “one of the most maligned military figures in the Confederacy.” Early’s promise to refrain from defamatory attacks against his detractors while standing by his actions served notice to those who sought to scapegoat him for the Confederacy’s ultimate defeat. To those who judged him harshly, he had not a word of reproach, for how could those “entirely ignorant of the facts” and subject to the “false reports set afloat in a time of terrible war and public suffering” assume any differently? In defense of his own actions, he said

emphatically, "I have the consciousness of having done my duty to my country to the very best of my ability."¹³

Early did not merely wish to set the record straight, however. Like many memoirists who followed, Early championed the righteousness of his cause, becoming one of most vocal and strident proponents of the Lost Cause ideology. Indeed, Gallagher has recommended Early's memoir to those "susceptible to the deeply flawed [...] notion that national scars healed rapidly after Grant and Lee set a conciliatory public example at Appomattox." Early's snide and contemptuous summary of Grant's military strategy amply demonstrates this point. Grant was assuredly not a brilliant tactician, according to Early. The Union Army succeeded simply because it could continually conscript fresh recruits, thus overwhelming battle-worn Confederate troops. Because of its numeric superiority and its advantages in resources, Grant's army could afford to wage a war of attrition "until, by mere attrition, if by nothing else, there should be nothing left to him but an equal submission, with the loyal section of our common country, to the constitution and laws of the land.'" With the firm backing of President Lincoln, who encouraged Grant to "keep a-pegging," Grant succeeded. Grant would surely "give the world the benefit of his ideas," Early imagined, "and publish a work on strategy, which I suggest ought to be called 'The Lincoln-Grant or Pegging-Hammer Art of War.'"¹⁴

Here and throughout his memoirs, Early articulated the central tenets of the Lost Cause ideology – namely, that the Union had violated the principles of the Constitution and overthrown the government of the United States, that Confederates were the righteous heirs of the revolutionary generation, and that, in Gallagher's words, "Confederate defeat [was attributable] to the Union's deep pool of manpower and material strength" not to the moral bankruptcy of its cause. As Gallagher has explained, the ideology of the Lost Cause allowed its proponents to justify secession and war while at the same time giving them "something positive in a struggle that ended in unequivocal failure."¹⁵

Early thus wrote for those who shared his views. Writing a decade later, George Cary Eggleston published *A Rebel's Recollection* to a receptive northern reading audience. His memoir betrays the same sectional partisanship as those of Boyd and Early but without the sectional rancor. The preface to the first edition recalled a conversation with Oliver Johnson, "the best 'original abolitionist,'" on whether Eggleston should write his reminiscences "without fear of offending excellent people, or still worse, reanimating prejudices that were happily dying away." His luncheon companion encouraged Eggleston to venture forth. "Prejudice is the first-born

of ignorance,” Johnson reportedly replied, “and never outlives its father. The only thing necessary now to the final burial of the animosity existing between the sections,” Johnson continued, “is the North and the South shall learn to know and understand to each other.” Any effort that advances the knowledge of one section to the other “hastens the day of peace and harmony and brotherly love” desired by all good Americans. Eggleston’s recollections, then, display a love for his native Virginia and for the South, but not a hatred for his former enemies. As historian David Donald has aptly observed, Eggleston offered his book as an “epitaph for the land he loved.” Thirty years after the publication of the book’s first edition, Eggleston took pride in his efforts, knowing that *A Rebel’s Recollections* “ministered [...] to that reconciliation between North and South which I had hoped to help forward.”¹⁶

To this end, Eggleston encouraged an empathetic response from his northern readers. To understand the Confederacy, he suggested, the reader must “make of himself, for the time at least, a Confederate.” Eggleston did not wish to weary his reader by defending the Confederacy or its actions. Rather, he proposed to offer a series of postulates that his readers should accept before continuing to read – namely, that southerners believed that the Constitution guaranteed the right of secession; that southerners believed they owed their allegiance first and foremost to their state; that southerners were as patriotic to the Confederate cause as northerners were to the Union; and that his northern readers who had shouldered muskets and fought like heroes for the Union would have, had they been born in the South, “fought quite as bravely for secession” as they did against it. “If the reader will bear all this in mind,” Eggleston surmised, “we shall get on much better than we other wise could, in our effort to catch of glimpse of the war from a Southern point of view.”¹⁷

If Eggleston championed the principled campaign waged by Confederates, he did not disparage the Union’s war effort. His near hagiographic portrayals of Jeb Stuart, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson were not met with damning descriptions of Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, or any other Union general. Indeed, unlike Boyd and Early, he refrained from commenting on the Union’s prosecution of the war or its leaders, saving his recriminations for the fire-eaters who aroused passion for secession and for Jefferson Davis and his inept administration. The unflattering terms Eggleston used to describe the Confederacy’s internal enemies might easily have been inveighed against radical abolitionists and against Lincoln and his cabinet in Confederate memoirs published ten years earlier. By the mid-1870s, however, a shift was underway.

Despite the seeming prominence of Boyd's, Early's, and Eggleston's narratives, former Confederates did not corner the market on Reconstruction-era memoirs. Unionists were no less vested in shaping the tenor of postwar memory. Nor were they less inclined to champion a decidedly partisan interpretation of the war. When Sherman dedicated the first edition of his memoir, published in 1875, to "his comrades in arms," he most assuredly did not include his former enemies among their ranks. As Blight has observed, Sherman's memoirs did not argue "for reconciliation among warriors, but a victor's explanation of why the war was waged with calculated cruelty." Unlike Eggleston, who imagined a reading audience comprised largely of his former enemies, Sherman wrote largely for those who shared his views. His intended audience included only those "survivors" who had manifested "so often their intense love of the 'cause' which moved a nation to vindicate its own authority" and the next generation so that it might "learn that a country and government such as ours are worth fighting for, and dying for, if need be." His memoir clearly bears out this intent. Perhaps his most fulsome description of his army comes near the end of his memoir as he recalled President Johnson's ordered grand review. His men, he explained, demanded respect. Indeed, his well-disciplined, well-organized, and well-commanded Western army, once perceived as a "mob," convinced all that it was "an army in the proper sense." No wonder, Sherman added, "that it had swept through the South like a tornado." Even after the army had passed, the crowd lingered, eager to express its "confidence in the strength of a government which could claim such an army."¹⁸

These early memoirists were vindicationists. This need to explain and justify certainly held true for Early and Sherman, both of whom reprinted in their memoirs official reports, memoranda, and correspondence to shore up their positions. Put another way, "Sherman staged his memoirs to make himself look not merely good, as do all memoir writers, but to resemble the star of some Shakespearean play of his own composition." More was at stake than self-aggrandizement, however. In a contest over the establishment of an authoritative version of the war that brooked no competition, men like Early and Sherman made sure their voices rang the loudest.¹⁹

The Reconciliationist Impulse

The political and cultural world of the 1880s and 1890s did not look like that of 1860s and 1870s, however. Early's and Sherman's distinctly partisan rendering of the war gave way to a reconciliationist understanding – one

hinted at in Eggleston's recollections – that eschewed sectional recriminations and divisiveness. Henry Kyd Douglas, who had served with General Stonewall Jackson, originally wrote his memoirs in 1866 but set them aside for more than three decades. Explaining the corrections he had made as he revised the manuscript for publication he noted, “time has mellowed the acerbity of more youthful days. My wounds have healed long ago and have left not hurt.” Rather than rewrite passages entirely, Douglas more commonly commented on his tempered spirit. In describing his “decimated and ragged” brigade’s surrender at Appomattox, for example, Douglas noted the “heavy line of Union soldiers” that had stood in absolute silence. As his men passed by, the Union soldiers cheered. “For us,” Douglas wrote, “this soldierly generosity was more than we could bear. Many of the grizzled veterans wept like women, and my own eyes were as blind as my voice was dumb.” Although he remembered the incident, Douglas had forgotten the “keen agony of that bitter day” as he recalled “how that line of blue broke its respectful silence to pay such a tribute . . . to the little line in grey that had fought them to the finish and only surrendered because it was destroyed.” More than time had tempered Douglas’s bitterness, and his wounds were not the only ones that had healed.²⁰

U.S. General and former president Ulysses S. Grant prefaced his 1885 memoir with a promise to avoid the sectional rancor that had marked much of the Reconstruction era. “In preparing these volumes for the public,” he declared, “I have entered upon the task with the sincere desire to avoid doing injustice to any one, whether on the National or the Confederate side, other than the avoidable injustice of not making mention often where special mention is due.” Indeed, he wrote of a kind of camaraderie between Union and Confederate soldiers, a sense of “brothers in arms” that had guided the men. In writing of the fall of Vicksburg, for example, he noted that the two armies “fraternized as if they had been fighting for the same cause.” He described the Confederate defenders of the city as “gal-lant,” a trait recognized and appreciated by his men. When Confederate troops surrendered and walked by “their late antagonists,” his men refrained from jeering or celebrating, not wishing to ridicule or pain the defeated soldiers. “Really,” he maintained, “I believe there was a feeling of sadness just then in the breasts of the Union soldiers at seeing the dejection of their late antagonists.” Grant’s use of the term “late antagonists” twice in the same paragraph is telling, for the war continued for another twenty months. Although he referred specifically to the armies at Vicksburg, he in effect erased the past two decades and wrote the reconciliationist impulse of the post-Reconstruction era into the middle of the war.²¹

Grant's conciliatory tone bespoke a need for sectional healing that allowed for the reintegration of the former Confederacy into the body politic – but at great cost. One need only turn to Susie King Taylor's memoir to understand the repercussions of denying the emancipatory legacy of the war. Grant worried that a "conflict between the races" might emerge. "The condition of the colored man within our borders may become a source of anxiety," he explained. Although Grant conceded that African Americans should be afforded "a right to remain here as any other class of our citizens," he nonetheless proposed annexing Santo Domingo as a solution to the "race problem." Grant imagined the colonization plan would be attractive to former slaves who would cheerfully move, "so as to have independent states governed by their own race." Those who moved would still be protected by the federal government, he promised, but "the citizens of Santo Domingo would be almost wholly colored." Reunion ensured a more powerful, peaceful, and prosperous nation, according to Grant. But this "new era" was held out for whites only.²²

Despite Grant's vision of a strengthened nation, or perhaps because of it, his memoir has emerged as the exemplar of the genre. Writing more than half a century ago, literary scholar Edmund Wilson commented that Grant's *Private Memoirs* "used to stand, like a private attestation of victory of the Union forces, on the shelves of every private Union home." In his own day, Wilson imagined only students of the Civil War read the hefty tome. Even so, Wilson ranked *Personal Memoirs* "as the most remarkable work of its kind" since Julius Caesar's *Commentaries*. Perhaps more important, Wilson saw Grant's memoirs as a "unique expression of the national character," much like Thoreau's *Walden* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The praise from historians has been equally fulsome. That the least vituperative, most generous of memoirs has been singled out as a classic is telling. James McPherson has observed that Grant is "generous with his praise for other officers and sparing with criticism, carping and backbiting." Although he kept himself at the center of his story, Grant's memoirs, according to McPherson, demonstrated "less egotism than is typical of the genre." In short, Grant becomes the "'unheroic' hero" of his memoirs and of the war.²³

If others failed to match Grant's circumspection and generosity, they nonetheless responded to the reconciliationist impulse, even if inelegantly. For some, like John Gordon, the road to reunion was bumpy. Gordon disclaimed any interest in writing a "comprehensive description" of "the war between the States." Indeed, such a task was, in his mind, impossible, given the passion with which the contest had been fought. "The time may

not have arrived for a full and fair history of that most interesting period in the Republic's life," he explained. "The man capable of writing it with entire justice to both sides is perhaps yet unborn." He held out hope that the scholar might yet arrive. "If endowed with the requisite breadth and clearness of view, with inflexible mental integrity and absolute freedom from all bias," Gordon believed, "he will produce the most instructive and thrilling record in the world's deathless annals, and cannot fail to make a contribution of measureless value to the American people and to the cause of free government throughout the world." Heady words. But if Gordon fell short of the task, he nonetheless strove "to command the confidence of the fair-minded in all sections." In claiming to offer a dispassionate and judicial reading of the "divergent opinion and ceaseless controversies" that had rent the nation apart, Gordon emphasized the shared history of a "great and enlightened people who were of the same race, supporters of the same Constitution, and joint heirs of the same freedom." In so doing, Gordon hoped his memoir would raise in estimation each section to the other, "and thus strengthen the sentiment of intersectional fraternity which is essential to complete national unity."²⁴

By the memoir's end, Gordon's prose had become rhapsodic. "The unseemly things which occurred in the great conflict between the States should be forgotten, or at least forgiven," he advised, "and no longer permitted to disturb complete harmony between North and South." The reconciled nation would do well to counsel its children:

to hold in perpetual remembrance all that was great and good on both sides; to comprehend the inherited convictions for which saintly women suffered and patriotic men died; to recognize the unparalleled carnage as proof of unrivaled courage; to appreciate the singular absence of personal animosity and the frequent manifestation between those brave antagonists of a good-fellowship such as never before been witnessed between hostile armies.

Absolving the Confederacy of any treasonous intent, Gordon argued that both sides fought to protect "what they conceived to be threatened rights and liberties." The "issues" that divided the nation were conceived in the founding of the Republic, he claimed, and were "forever buried in an ocean of fraternal blood." Every drop of blood spilled, every shot fired, every tear shed has contributed to "the upbuilding of American manhood and for the future defense of American freedom." In what has to be one of the most effusive articulations of the reconciliationist position, Gordon compared the unified nation to the Christian Church: "[R]ising from its baptism in blood with a national life more robust, a national union more complete

and a national influence ever widening," he concluded, the Republic "shall go forever forward in its benign mission to humanity." The nation, Gordon implied, could enter the new century confidently and boldly, secure in the knowledge that it had resolved the sectional crisis of an earlier era.²⁵

The soaring rhetoric of Gordon and his fellow reconciliationists might have been what the nation wanted at the turn of the twentieth century, but it was not what it needed. Or, put differently, it only partially fulfilled needs, leaving others largely unacknowledged and unaddressed. The consequences of denial and repression have been profound. Scholars have long understood the reconciliationist project as manufactured, constructed, and designed to meet sociopolitical and cultural imperatives. Recently, they have begun to reexamine the terroristic violence waged against African Americans and their allies that undergirded this effort. The portrait that has emerged in the last decade or so demonstrates that more than just purple prose was needed to ensure a triumphant America at the close of the nineteenth century.

The hundreds of memoirs that flooded the literary marketplace in the first five decades following Confederate defeat partially belie poet Walt Whitman's famous and oft-quoted lament: "the real war will never get in the books." "In the mushy influences of current times," he wrote in the early 1880s, "the fervid atmosphere and typical events of those years are in danger of being totally forgotten." Certainly no single memoir recorded the real war. Then again, no memoirist undertook such a task. Memoirs are, by nature, individuated and idiosyncratic. They tell us a great deal about the ways in which individuals experienced the war. They tell us even more about the ways in which those individuals wanted the war remembered. Above all, they proclaim brazenly that the lives of their authors mattered. Perhaps that is as real as it gets.

Notes

- 1 Mary Ann Harris Gay, *My Life in Dixie During the War* (1897), J. H. Segars (ed.) (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 7.
- 2 William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General William Tecumseh Sherman* (1875), Introduction by Michael Fellman (New York: Penguin, 2000), p. 5; Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of Armies; an Account of the Final Campaign of the Army of the Potomac, Based upon Personal Reminiscences of the Fifth Army Corps* (1915), Introduction by Brooks D. Simpson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. xi.
- 3 Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp: An African American Women's Civil War Memoir* (1902), Introduction by Catherine Clinton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), p. 61.

- 4 James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: The Civil War in America* (1896) Introduction by James I. Robertson, Jr. (ed.) (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Co., 1975), pp. xvii, 258, 399, 401, 405; John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (1903), Introduction by Ralph Lowell Eckert (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1993), pp. 160–161.
- 5 Sherman, *Memoirs*, p. 3.
- 6 Belle Boyd, *Belle Boyd in Camp and In Prison* (1865), Introduction by Sharon Kennedy-Noelle (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Jubal A. Early, *Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence in the Confederate States of America* (1866), Introduction by Gary Gallagher (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Sherman, *Memoirs*, p. 3; Gordon, *Reminiscences*.
- 7 David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), p. 149.
- 8 David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002).
- 9 Boyd, *Belle*, p. 66.
- 10 Ibid. pp. 266, 70, 266–267.
- 11 Early, *Memoir*, p. xxiii.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., p. xxii; Gallagher in *ibid.*, p. xi; Early, *Memoir*, pp. 138, xxiv.
- 14 Early, *Memoir*, pp. xiv, 35.
- 15 Ibid., p. xvi.
- 16 George Cary Eggleston, *A Rebel's Recollections* (1875), Introduction by David Donald (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), pp. 19, 10, 23.
- 17 Eggleston, *A Rebel's Recollections*, pp. 55–57.
- 18 Blight, *Race*, p. 162; Sherman, *Memoirs*, pp. 3, 731–732.
- 19 Michael Fellman in Sherman, *Memoirs*, p. vii.
- 20 Henry Kyd Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall, being Chiefly the War Experiences of the Youngest Member of Jackson's Staff from the John Brown Raid to the Hanging of Mrs. Surratt*, notes by Fletcher M. Green (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), pp. vii, 334.
- 21 Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (1886), Introduction by James McPherson (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp. 3, 314.
- 22 Ibid., 637–638.
- 23 Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (1962), (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984) pp. 132–133; James McPherson in Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. xxiv–xxv.
- 24 Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. xxv–xxvii.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 464–465.

CHAPTER II

Civil War Narrative History

T. Austin Graham

Looking back in 1961 on the America that had gone to war with itself a hundred years before, Bruce Catton saw leaders and citizens who were tragically incapable of comprehending their historic moment. "This was a time when most men were purblind," he wrote in his ominously titled work *The Coming Fury*. "Neither side believed that the other side was deeply in earnest, and neither side was prepared to face the consequences of its own acts."¹ Clarity of vision could only come with the passage of time, and in the years before Catton wrote, any number of historians had tried to explain the motives, aims, events, and circumstances that had led to that difficult era and its (possibly) unforeseeable bloodshed.

Needless to say, historians have kept at the task in the half-century since Catton penned those words. The Civil War is by far the most written about event in the nation's history, and estimates suggest that there are significantly more than 50,000 books devoted to the conflict. There has been a barrage of military accounts, and Abraham Lincoln has proven an inexhaustible subject for biographers. There have been histories of single years, single campaigns, single battles, and single days of single battles. There are "private" and "inner" versions of the Civil War to balance out the public ones, as well as studies from any number of racial, ethnic, gender, and national perspectives. Virtually every aspect of the war has at least one book devoted to it, and there are few periods of American history that we know as much about.

This impressive tradition of scholarship has done more than document a pivotal period in the nation's history. Considered as a collective and ongoing body of work, it also reflects the many ways in which the United States changed during the 150 years that followed Appomattox. Every generation since the war has had its own interpreters of the conflict, and their works of history have tended to tell two stories rather than just one. The war of the 1860s is fought again and again on their pages, moving through a familiar series of defeats and triumphs. But these scholars almost always

offer a portrait of their own times as well, dwelling on the preoccupations and prejudices of their present moments even as they turn to the past.

Nowhere has this been more obvious than on the subject of race – an overwhelming concern in the Civil War, of course, but also in American life ever since. To read the leading works of Civil War history in the years after 1865 is to see a nation coming increasingly to terms with its legacy of enslavement and emancipation, and the continuing consequences of that legacy. As the United States passed through the years of Jim Crow segregation, the civil rights movement, and affirmative action, its history books changed accordingly. They became more and more likely to figure the Civil War as a struggle not just to settle the fate of the slaves but also to determine the racial character of the nation; their resulting stories were sometimes tragic, sometimes glorious, and usually something of both. Read together today, these histories reveal an America growing ever more willing to face its racial past between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries, and they are a chronicle of cautious, battle-tested hope. More is being written about the conflict today, and more will be in the future, for the long and distinguished tradition of Civil War history has always been a history of postwar America, as well.

The war's racial stakes presented a problem for historians from the very beginning, for the people who had actually dictated military policy and prosecuted the campaigns had been rather evasive on the subject. Lincoln, a canny and often cagey politician, went out of his way to deemphasize slavery as a war cause while the fighting was happening, and Northern abolitionists constantly argued over how committed he was to black Americans. As for the Confederacy, its leaders began denying that they had fought to preserve slavery almost as soon as they surrendered, with the memoirs of Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens concerned with gauzy, abstract ideals instead. It was therefore up to scholars to determine what role black Americans had played in the conflict and to decide whether the fighting had been, in the words of the scholar George Washington Williams in 1888, "a war about them," or "a war for them," or neither of these things.²

Many of the first histories of the Civil War were nakedly partisan, often written by men who had participated in the conflict and who saw their books as warfare waged by other means. Their titles left little question of what the authors thought about their opponents: Unionists could see their suspicions about Southerners confirmed in Deacon Dye's *The Adder's Den, or, Secrets of the Great Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America* (1864) and Henry Wilson's *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in*

America (1872), while Edward A. Pollard's *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (1866) gave secession an air of nostalgia and heroism. Even professionally trained historians had powerful investments in the war's outcome, and the most prominent excoriated the South and chattel slavery in the strongest possible terms. John William Draper's *History of the American Civil War* (1867–1868) noted with relish that just as “the African many a time fainted under the lash of a cruel task-master,” so too was the defeated South now “under the lash of THE ANGEL OF RETRIBUTION” as a consequence of having “hugged slavery to her bosom.”³ The German historian Hermann von Holst, meanwhile, was so offended by the Confederacy that he devoted much of his *Constitutional and Political History of the United States* (1877–1892) to cursing the Founding Fathers, on the grounds that their protections of slavery had made a Southern rebellion inevitable. “How many crowned despots can be mentioned in the history of the old world who have done things which compare in accursedness with this law to which the democratic republic gave birth?” he asked.⁴

For some of these engaged historians, the Union victory had set auspicious terms for America's future course. George Washington Williams, who authored one of the first histories of black soldiers in the war, saw the 1860s as a time of epic successes: the North had fought for and achieved both emancipation and national unification, and the former slaves had proven their patriotism and manhood while fighting for their freedom. As for the Confederacy's cause, it had been entirely discredited. “No descendant will be proud of its memory, no friend of humanity will mourn at its sepulchre,” he predicted. “Christian civilization the world over will rejoice that such a cause has perished from among the governments of mankind; while the Negro, with unexampled charity, if not able to forget, freely forgives the murderers of his kinsmen under the pretext of law.”⁵ For Williams, the war's meaning was all but settled, and he saw great prospects for black Americans in those postwar decades.

Williams's hopes, however, were misplaced, for the field of Civil War history was on the verge of making an abrupt turn. In the 1890s it became considerably more sympathetic to the old Confederate view, and considerably less friendly to African Americans. The reasons for the change were often connected to current events, with some historians – led by the notoriously reactionary William Archibald Dunning – writing to oppose the expansion of black political rights. Culture also seems to have played a role, for the new histories frequently invoked tropes from the era's most sensational and racist works of popular fiction. Over time, the line separating

historical Civil War writing from the imaginative kind grew alarmingly thin: by the early twentieth century, Thomas Dixon's neo-Confederate novel *The Clansman* was being assigned in graduate history seminars in Northern universities, while *Lady Baltimore*, a white supremacist romance by Owen Wister, was cited by the most widely admired American historian of the day. Civil War writing at century's turn might be empirical or propagandistic, academic or sentimental, but in most cases it affirmed or was careful not to contradict its readers' prejudices.

The most influential histories of this period were written by Northerners, and they almost never excused secession or the institution of slavery. But they were also becoming more and more dedicated to what the constitutional historian John W. Burgess called "one of the highest works of history, the reconciliation of men to the plans of Providence for their perfection."⁶ Effecting the "reconciliation of men" required scholars to take the South's reasons for rebellion seriously, and Burgess proved distressingly adept at adopting Confederate views of black Americans in his work. While he praised the North for fighting a war against slavery, he also argued that kidnapped Africans had been "entirely contented with their new lot"; he scolded abolitionists for exaggerating divisions between North and South at midcentury; and he was incensed by Republican efforts to enfranchise African Americans during Reconstruction.⁷ "There is something natural in the subordination of an inferior race to a superior race, even to the point of the enslavement of the inferior race, but there is nothing natural in the opposite," Burgess wrote. "Slavery was a great wrong," but in his opinion, Northern reformers had punished the South "far in excess of the crime" by insisting on black voting rights in the post-war years.⁸

Civil War histories at century's turn often struck a queasy balance between condemning slavery and abhorring black advancement, and they did so in large part because their authors had fallen under the sway of "modern," pseudoscientific doctrines of black inferiority. The most prominent example of this tendency was to be found in James Ford Rhodes, whose multivolume *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* (1893–1906) set the standard for Civil War scholarship for years. The early volumes of Rhodes's massive undertaking took a powerful stand against slavery, calling the Confederacy "a mighty effort to conserve an institution condemned alike by Christianity and by ethics."⁹ But in later installments, Rhodes claimed that black Americans were hereditarily incapable of developing adult mental faculties, that Southern freedmen constituted a "black terror" for whites, and that Northern reformers had

foolishly attempted to enfranchise “an ignorant mass of an alien race” after the war.¹⁰ Idealism was one thing for Rhodes, but biology another. “I do not believe that philosophers, scientists and historians would govern the country to suit the greatest number as well as do the statesmen and politicians,” he wrote, “but there are times when the men who work in libraries and laboratories should be called in counsel and this was pre-eminently such an occasion.”¹¹ Rhodes praised Northern politicians for ceasing to insist on black advancement after 1877, and his condensed, one-volume account of the Civil War won the second Pulitzer Prize for History in 1918.

This period of Civil War scholarship coincided with the mass disfranchisement of black Americans under Jim Crow laws, and it would be decades before historians studied the war’s racial stakes with any real sensitivity. Scholars became more interested in the war’s consequences for American nationalism instead, and they tended to discuss slavery not as a moral issue but rather as a sort of local curiosity that had created regrettable regional tensions between North and South. Woodrow Wilson’s *Division and Reunion* (1893) applauded “the natural, inevitable ascendancy of the whites” that took place in the postwar decades, and he credited it with turning a formerly divided nation into a “homogeneous” one that “subordinated every other sentiment to that of hope.”¹² William E. Dodd’s *Expansion and Conflict* (1915) contended that the war had come about because all Americans, black and white alike, had been excessively loyal to their regions: even the slaves were said to have been narrow partisans who “boasted that their masters could whip the world in arms.”¹³ And Edward Channing’s Pulitzer-winning *The War for Southern Independence* (1926) presented the fight mainly as a clash of “two distinct social organizations,” although Channing still found time to speculate on the biological features of “the negro’s physical and mental constitution and moral make-up.”¹⁴

The passion that slavery had inspired in the first Civil War histories was fading, and it all but disappeared in many of the most well-known and influential works of scholarship from the 1920s and 1930s. Charles and Mary Beard’s provocative study of 1927, *The Rise of American Civilization*, treated the war as an exclusively economic matter, part of an unfolding process of industrialization that had begun decades before Lincoln, Davis, their generals, or any prominent abolitionists appeared on the scene. The conflict’s roots, they said, were “in social groupings founded on differences in climate, soil, industries, and labor systems, in divergent social forces, rather than varying degrees of righteousness and wisdom.”¹⁵ The Beards

glossed over the “physical combat that punctuated the conflict,” for in their opinion it had “merely hastened the inevitable.” As for the emancipation of the slaves, the Beards saw only a “transaction” that resulted in “the complete destruction of about four billion dollars’ worth of ‘goods’ in the possession of slave owners without compensation – the most stupendous act of sequestration in the history of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence.”¹⁶ The end of slavery might have been an important moment in the war, but it was not an especially human one in the Beards’ work of economic determinism.

In other histories from this period, the antislavery movement was depicted as nothing so much as a symptom of collective hallucination, an outbreak of hysteria over a symbolic nonissue that had led to an unnecessary and pointless war. These histories – known then and today as the “revisionist” school of Civil War writing – were relentlessly cynical, and in many ways they reflected the weariness that had taken hold of Americans after the disappointments of the First World War. James G. Randall’s *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (1937) saw the two wars as equally squalid and misguided, each accompanied by “crime, intolerant mass psychology, speculative excess, business depression, moral slump, official sinning,” and any number of other depressingly persistent problems.¹⁷ Slaveholders, meanwhile, were seldom the villains in the “revisionist” histories; instead, the war was blamed on politicians, abolitionists, and artists who were alleged to have whipped the public into a frenzy. As Avery Craven put it in *The Repressible Conflict* (1939), Americans “fought because they had come to fear and hate – because they had at last accepted a distorted picture of both themselves and the people in other sections.”¹⁸ And in the opinions of Craven and Randall, slavery had not been a significant enough problem to justify such emotion. For Craven, the lot of laborers did not differ much from region to region in the nineteenth century, and “the idea” of slavery “was always worse than the fact itself.”¹⁹ For Randall, the “reforming zeal” of the prewar years was generally “an agent of destruction and disturbance, more than a force for genuine social improvement.”²⁰

The “revisionists” were not the only voices in the field, however, and some historical works of the 1930s pushed back by arguing that slavery had been the overriding cause of the Civil War and that the problem of racial prejudice in American life had not yet been adequately discussed. It is in these books that a twenty-first-century reader finally begins to see stirrings of what might be called a “modern” understanding of the 1860s. Arthur Charles Cole’s social history of America during the war, *The Irrepressible Conflict* (1934), argued that slavery had distorted every aspect of Southern

society in the mid-nineteenth century, “from the planter capitalists at the top to the willing peasant hangers-on at the bottom.”²¹ Dwight Lowell Dumond’s *Antislavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States* (1939) named bondage as the occasion for the fighting and expressed sympathy for the continuing plight of black Americans. And W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* (1935) reframed the war as having been fought by black Americans rather than for them: he emphasized the agency and self-emancipation of the slaves, and he argued that the war’s deciding factor had been a collective decision by black labor to stage “a general strike against slavery” rather than work on behalf of the Confederacy.²² For Du Bois, it was black Americans, and not any general or president, who “held the key to the war,” and “both sides should have known it.”²³

For these scholars, rewriting the Civil War was not merely an academic matter. In many cases, they believed that flawed histories of the nineteenth century helped perpetuate unjust social conditions in the twentieth century, and they warned that racism kept the American historical profession from living up to its own intellectual ideals. Dumond noted in his book that “race prejudice still lives, and the writings of trained historians . . . have such an overtone of moralizing or apology as to leave the impression their wishes determined what they should accept as truth.”²⁴ Du Bois went further, finding that the works of Rhodes and others had shored up the “foundation of our present lawlessness and loss of democratic ideals,” that they had “led the world to embrace and worship the color bar as social salvation,” and that they had done their part “to range mankind in ranks of mutual hatred and contempt, at the summons of a cheap and false myth.” Earlier works of Civil War history read more as propaganda than academic endeavor to Du Bois, and he predicted that the nation would “never have a science of history until we have in our colleges men who regard the truth as more important than the defense of the white race.”²⁵

A significant step forward came in 1947 when Allan Nevins published the first book in what would become his eight-volume *Ordeal of the Union* series. The completed work was a grand survey of the years between the Mexican-American War and the assassination of Lincoln, and it brought much needed specificity to the conversation about the war’s causes, particularly in regard to slavery and race. Nevins expressed the same moral fervor that the first historians of the conflict did, calling human bondage “the greatest misery, the greatest wrong, the greatest curse to white and black alike that America has ever known.”²⁶ But he declined to discuss this “misery” in simplistic terms or to apportion all the blame to the

South, as he believed that the war had not been “about slavery alone” but had instead been fought “over slavery *and* the future position of the Negro race in North America.”²⁷ Citizens of all sections had had a stake in the era’s most important questions: What would a post-Emancipation, multiracial United States be like, and what would whites need to do to bring it into being? Unfortunately, Nevins concluded, most Americans found it easier to go to war than work toward answers. His books therefore identified two great failings in the years before 1860: “the refusal of Southerners to treat slavery as a progressive and evolutionary system, leading by regular gradations to freedom, and the refusal of Northerners to acknowledge that in equity they must share the heavy burdens of racial readjustment.”²⁸

Nevins continued publishing *Ordeal of the Union* in installments through 1971, and those years saw the final contributions to what might be called the “heroic tradition” of Civil War scholarship – that is, the classical practice of writing multivolume histories of the conflict that sometimes ran to thousands of pages. Two other ambitious overviews appeared around the time of the war’s 100-year anniversary, Shelby Foote’s *The Civil War: A Narrative* (1958–1974) and Bruce Catton’s *Centennial History of the Civil War* (1961–1965), both of them trilogies. Each man wrote for a broad audience – Foote was a novelist, whereas Catton had already penned numerous works of popular history, including one for children – and their accounts were both characterized by vivid description, dramatic flair, and epic stakes. Foote’s march through the war was an essentially military affair, offering blow-by-blow descriptions of battles but little in the way of explanations for why the war happened. Larger questions of politics, social change, and racial prejudice fell mostly by the wayside, and Foote’s readers are more likely to remember his poetic evocations of combat: the “eight holocaustic minutes” of the first Cold Harbor charge, for instance, or the “lurid moonscape” on which the Battle of the Crater was fought, with Confederates massacring trapped Union soldiers “as if the shots were directed into a barrel of paralyzed fish.”²⁹ In contrast, Catton’s chronicle accorded with Nevins’s racially attuned scholarship, presenting the war as “a remorseless revolutionary struggle” to assuage the nation’s guilt over slavery and to face its fears of a multiracial future – “emotions deeper than the pit and blacker than midnight, convulsive stirrings in the nerve system that went beyond anything with which men of that day could cope intellectually.”³⁰

If the histories of Nevins and Catton seem more “modern” than most of those that preceded them, it is not only because of each author’s focus

and sensibility. Both undertakings carry the unmistakable impress of the mid-twentieth century, suggesting that later events and the passage of time had cast the war in a new light. Catton pointedly described Africans as having been kept in “steaming concentration camps” before embarking on the Middle Passage, no thing to say lightly in the years after the Second World War.³¹ And when the final volume of *Ordeal of the Union* appeared in 1971, Nevins suggested that John Wilkes Booth’s plot ought to be studied “for possible use in the cases of assassination that have all too frequently horrified the American people during the period of more than a century since Lincoln was murdered.”³² In an age still coming to terms with the ethnic exterminations in Europe and the persistent shame of racial subjugation in the United States, one could ask whether the lessons of the Civil War had ever been learned and whether it were not still being fought.

The new histories of the Civil War were not only colored by contemporary traumas, however. As the civil rights movement won significant victories for blacks in the 1960s, scholars came more and more to appreciate the endurance and bravery of those earlier Americans who had lived through slavery or committed themselves to the fight against it. The subject had never been entirely ignored by earlier Civil War historians, of course, and ever since the late nineteenth-century work of Williams there had been a dedicated – if infrequently read – school that attended to black laborers, soldiers, and leaders during the conflict.³³ But the progressive achievements of the 1960s seem to have helped effect an overall transformation in the historical profession, and today it is all but impossible to imagine a respected treatment of the Civil War that does not meaningfully engage with the black experience of it.

This change was perhaps best exemplified by the work of James M. McPherson, who began his scholarly career writing about the abolitionist movement and eventually became the dean of modern Civil War history. His first book, *The Struggle for Equality*, appeared in 1964 and narrated many of the war’s familiar events, but it did so almost entirely from the perspective of antislavery reformers. In response to earlier historians who had found these “radicals” to be misguided at best and fanatical at worst, he contended that “the United States has yet to measure up to the ideals of the abolitionist crusade,” and he explicitly compared his book’s heroes with the leaders of the ascendant civil rights movement.³⁴ “They were the first ‘freedom riders,’” he argued, “and their spirit still pervades the struggle for racial justice. The victories of Martin Luther King and his followers are, in a very real sense, victories of the abolitionist crusade.”³⁵

A little more than two decades later, McPherson had received as much professional validation as a historian possibly can. In 1988 he published a comprehensive study of the Civil War era, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, as part of the *Oxford History of the United States* series, and its story of the war has since become something close to the definitive account. Weaving race, politics, combat, technology, agriculture, and a great deal more into its narrative, *Battle Cry of Freedom* showed that mid-nineteenth century America was overwhelmingly concerned with settling the “meanings of slavery and freedom” as “they dissolved and re-formed into new patterns in the crucible of war.”³⁶ It shared the 1989 Pulitzer with Taylor Branch’s *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63*, it spent months on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and a quarter of a century later, it remains a standard history of the conflict.

It is hard to generalize about the rich and expansive field of Civil War history in the years following the 1960s, but a few tendencies can be discerned. Historians of the last four decades have avoided offering unitary explanations for the conflict; they do not feel, as their predecessors often did, that it can be explained by “slavery” or “sectionalism” or “economics” or “constitutionalism” alone. Rather, the modern historian studies the ways in which the era’s many ambiguities, contradictions, complexities, and conflicting issues tended to exacerbate and bleed into one another as the war approached and was waged. David M. Potter’s *The Impending Crisis* (1976), for example, argues that the war was caused not by slavery per se but, more precisely, by the American people’s inability to grapple with the endless conundrums that slavery presented. Potter’s story is a winding and convoluted one in which paradoxical statesmen profess “values that could not logically be reconciled,” Northerners and Southerners find ingenious, self-deceiving ways of “temporizing” with the peculiar institution, and abolitionists offend their fellow citizens by threatening “the tranquility of the northern mind.”³⁷ Similarly, Peter J. Parish’s *The American Civil War* (1975) notes that while slavery is now generally accepted as the single most important cause of the war, explaining it has become more complicated than ever: as Parish’s book shows, slavery was a uniquely difficult issue because it was bound up with so many other ones, be they political, moral, economic, or regional. Approaching this era now seems to require that historians be wide-ranging and that they recognize, in Potter’s influential words, that “culture, economic interest, and values may all reflect the same fundamental forces at work in a society, in which case each will appear as an aspect of the other.”³⁸

If the Civil War has become more complex and challenging to study over time, the ways that Americans felt about it have come into much

sharper focus. Recent years have seen several works dedicated to “common” participants in the conflict, people who did not craft national policy or command armies but nonetheless lived through those trying times. Here, too, twenty-first-century readers can see a remarkable change in national attitudes taking place over the decades. The earliest histories of enlisted soldiers – Bell Irwin Wiley’s groundbreaking studies *The Life of Johnny Reb* (1943) and *The Life of Billy Yank* (1952) – found that most troops held black Americans in low regard and that Northerners seldom thought of emancipation as one of their primary aims. Yet a more recent work, Chandra Manning’s *What This Cruel War Was Over* (2007), concludes that soldiers on all sides understood themselves to be fighting either to defend or destroy slavery, and Manning marvels that scholars have ever been able to think otherwise. Historians of the “common” Civil War have also begun to look beyond the battlefield: Drew Gilpin Faust’s *Mothers of Invention* (1996), for example, provides an important perspective on slaveholding women during those years. And in histories of cultural memory like *Race and Reunion* (2001) and *American Oracle* (2011), David W. Blight has demonstrated that the Civil War continues to reverberate not only because of what it was but also because of how Americans have chosen to recall it over the years.

But perhaps the most important quality of the modern historical field is its recognition that the Civil War did not end with Robert E. Lee’s surrender and that its campaigns continued through Reconstruction and beyond. Here, the twenty-first-century scholar is truly able to see something that the war’s first historians could not – that emancipation was not all that would be needed to secure justice for black Americans and that addressing the consequences of slavery would require decades of effort, not just a four-year war. Where earlier, racist historians like Burgess and Rhodes wrote about Reconstruction to offer their condolences to Southern whites, today’s scholars see the postwar years as a continuation of the nation’s greatest conflict. Like other recent works, Allen C. Guelzo’s Civil War survey *Fateful Lightning* (2012) ends not in 1865 but 1877, with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South. At that point, Guelzo writes, history began to repeat itself. Newly free, “many of the former Confederate leaders stepped forward to reassert their old roles. The veteran survivors of the Confederate armies, without jobs, often without land, and frequently without direction, found it all too easy to fall in behind them.” The result, Guelzo concludes, was “little better than a low-level resumption of hostilities, only this time in the form of terrorism against blacks and their white Republican allies.”³⁹

There is a chilly implication to such stories, which would of course be retold again and again over the twentieth century. What if the Civil War was not quite so significant as it has seemed and was instead merely a chapter in a much longer and recurring narrative of racial hatred and national shame? Might it be the case that, in studying the conflict so intensively, we have missed the greater significance of the American past and allowed a single event to overwhelm a larger truth? Historical writing is necessarily selective, and it might well be that every book on a Civil War battle, general, or statesman distracts attention from some other, more pressing subject. But recent histories have shown that the reverse can happen as well. See, for example, James Oakes's 2013 work *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865*. In Oakes's telling, the war is but one part of a larger historical event: it concludes a decades-long movement to end American slavery by activist, constitutional, and, of course, military means. When we read a historian like Oakes, we no longer see slavery and abolition as causes or aspects of a great war; rather, we see the war as an aspect of a great cause. And if the Civil War can be transformed this dramatically after 150 years of historical writing and the publication of thousands upon thousands of books, we can only imagine what the story will be at the bicentennial and beyond.

Notes

- 1 Bruce Catton, *The Coming Fury* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), p. 122.
- 2 George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861–1865* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1888), p. 139.
- 3 John William Draper, *History of the American Civil War*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1867–1868), vol. 3, p. 566.
- 4 Hermann von Holst, *The Constitutional and Political History of the United States: 1750–1833, State Sovereignty and Slavery*, trans. John J. Lalor and Alfred B. Mason (Chicago: Callaghan and Company, 1877), p. 305.
- 5 Williams, *A History*, p. 319.
- 6 John W. Burgess, *The Middle Period: 1817–1858* (1897; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. xii.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 8 John W. Burgess, *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866–1876* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp. 245, 297.
- 9 James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, 7 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers and the Macmillan Company, 1893–1906), vol. III, p. 119.
- 10 *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 558 and vol. VI, p. 36.

- 11 Ibid., vol. VI, p. 42.
- 12 Woodrow Wilson, *Division and Reunion: 1829–1889* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893), p. 273.
- 13 William E. Dodd, *Expansion and Conflict* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), pp. 277.
- 14 Edward Channing, *A History of the United States, Vol. VI: The War for Southern Independence* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926), pp. 3, 21.
- 15 Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), vol. II, p. 51.
- 16 Ibid., vol. II, p. 100.
- 17 J.G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1937), p. 689.
- 18 Avery Craven, *The Repressible Conflict, 1830–1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), p. 63. See also Craven's *The Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942).
- 19 Craven, *The Repressible Conflict.*, p. 37.
- 20 Randall, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, pp. 147–148.
- 21 Arthur Charles Cole, *The Irrepressible Conflict, 1850–1865* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 38.
- 22 W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1935), p. 57.
- 23 Ibid., p. 63.
- 24 Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1939), p. 37.
- 25 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, p. 723, 725.
- 26 Allan Nevins, *Fruits of Manifest Destiny, 1847–1852* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 461.
- 27 Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln: Prologue to Civil War, 1859–1861* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 470.
- 28 Nevins, *Fruits*, p. 533.
- 29 Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Red River to Appomattox* (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 299, 536–537.
- 30 Bruce Catton, *Terrible Swift Sword* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 178; Catton, *The Coming Fury*, p. 85.
- 31 Catton, *The Coming Fury*, p. 81.
- 32 Allan Nevins, *The Organized War to Victory, 1864–1865* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 334.
- 33 In addition to some of the works already mentioned, earlier decades had seen Bell Irvin Wiley's *Southern Negroes, 1861–1865* (1938), Herbert Aptheker's *The Negro in the Civil War* (1938), Benjamin Quarles' *The Negro in the Civil War* (1953), and Dudley Taylor Cornish's *The Sable Arm* (1956).
- 34 James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 431.

35 Ibid., pp. 431–432.

36 James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. viii.

37 David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (New York: Harper Collins, 1976), pp. 45, 47.

38 Ibid., p. 41.

39 Allen C. Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 509. This turn in Civil War historiography was particularly influenced by the publication of Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

PART III

Figures

*Walt Whitman**Martin T. Buinicki*

In 1886, in an effort to secure financial support for the aging poet Walt Whitman, a group of his friends and supporters considered petitioning the government to award Whitman a pension in recognition of his service in the Union hospitals during the Civil War. Seeking the poet's approval for such a course, an associate wrote to him in December 1886, assuring him that "The Nation is deeply in your debt for the services you rendered during the war, not to mention its deeper debt to you as a poet which will be appreciated more and more as the years go on. . . . an influential member of committee on invalid pensions, tells me that you are fully entitled to a pension and that he will be very glad to be instrumental in securing it."¹ The poet responded immediately, expressing his gratitude, but stating, "I . . . do not consent to being an applicant for a pension . . . I do not deserve it."²

In spite of the poet's refusal, talk of the plan spread, and it soon became fodder for the escalating controversy over Civil War pensions and provided ammunition to some of the poet's detractors. In March 1887, author and veteran Thomas Wentworth Higginson took up the issue in an article "Women and Men. War Pensions for Women." As scholars have long recognized,³ the author's target was clearly Whitman:

There were many men who, being rejected from enlistment for physical defects, sought honorably to serve their country as hospital nurses or agents of the Sanitary Commission. A beginning has been made in the way of pensioning these men in the case of the proposed pension for Mr. Whitman, the poet; although he he [sic], is not wholly an instance in point, having been a man of conspicuously fine physique, but who deliberately preferred to serve in the hospital rather than the field. . . . There are hundreds of men who were in the war what General Bragg, with unusual frankness, called "the rubbish of the army," who now find it, in view of recent pension legislation, profitable to be poor, and picturesque to be worthless. Worse than this, there are many estimable persons whom a single twinge of rheumatism starts on the same downward track. I confess myself reluctant to see a similar temptation held out to either poets or women.⁴

Whereas Higginson derided the poet for “preferring” hospital service to active duty, thus disqualifying himself from governmental support, Baxter recognized Whitman’s work as both volunteer and poet as incurring the nation’s debt. In spite of their divergent views on Whitman’s service and his poetry, both men understood that to discuss one was necessarily to discuss the other: by the 1880s, Whitman’s reputation as poet and Civil War volunteer had become inextricably linked.

Such an outcome was likely far from Whitman’s mind when the war began. Like many, he was swept up in the enthusiasm of the moment, and he later looked back on this period with a surprising note of nostalgia, remarking,

What ran through the Land, as if by electric nerves, and show’d itself in stupendous and practical action, immediately after the firing on *the Flag* at Fort Sumter – the Nation (‘till then incredulous) flush’d in the face, and all its veins fiercely pulsing and pounding – the arm’d volunteers instantaneously springing up everywhere – the tumultuous processions of the regiments – Was it not grand to have lived in such scenes and days, and be absorb’d by them, and unloosen’d to them?⁵

The swell of Union sentiment swept up not only Whitman but also his family. His brother George enlisted within a week of the surrender of Fort Sumter,⁶ and his brother Andrew enlisted in 1862, but illness cut his service short, and he died of tuberculosis in 1863.⁷

As for the poet, he took up his pen and began composing war-themed poems: the first to see print appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* in September 1861 and was quickly reprinted in at least three other newspapers. “Beat! Beat! Drums!” captures the martial spirit of the moment, as the speaker catalogs how the song of drum and bugle interrupts the routine of life, sweeping away obstacles and competing obligations, to summon men to arms:

Beat! beat! drums! Blow! bugles! blow!
Make no parley – stop for no expostulation;
Mind not the timid – mind not the weeper or prayer;
Mind not the old man beseeching the young man;
Let not the child’s voice be heard, nor the mother’s entreaties. Recruit! recruit!⁸

A month later, Whitman submitted another poem, “1861,” to James Russell Lowell for publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*.⁹ Lowell declined the poem, which the poet later included in his Civil War volume *Drum-Taps* in 1865. Like “Beat! Beat! Drums!” “1861” reflects what Whitman saw as the tumult and excitement of the time and imagines a new poetry appropriate to the opening of the conflict: “ARM’D year!

year of the struggle! / No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you, terrible year!"¹⁰ The tone of these early works serves as a compelling counterpoint to the poet's later works based on his hospital experiences.

In the months that followed Lincoln's election and the secession of a number of Southern states, Whitman successfully published two other poems, both connected to the war and eventually collected in *Drum-Taps*: "Little Bells Last Night," later titled "I Heard You Solemn Sweet Pipes of the Organ," in which the sound of "War-suggesting trumpets" mingles with the pulse of the speaker's lover; and "Old Ireland," an apostrophe to the personified island, "an ancient sorrowful mother," assuring her that her son is not dead but "moves to-day, an armed man, in a new country."¹¹

The martial tone of these early poems reflects Whitman's confidence – shared by many at the time – that the Union would quickly prove victorious. Years later, the poet commented on such sentiments, although he insisted that he never shared them:

Even after the bombardment of Sumter, however, the gravity of the revolt, and the power and will of the Slave States for a strong and continued military resistance to National authority, was not at all realized through the North, except by a few. Nine-tenths of the people of the Free States look'd upon the rebellion, as started in South Carolina, from a feeling one-half of contempt and the other half composed of anger and incredulity.¹²

Informed by the poet's retrospective glance, this description fits easily into the dominant historical narrative of the early days of the war and may reveal some of the poet's own ideas regarding the likely duration of the war. Indeed, in July 1861, the poet wrote to his brother George: "All of us here think the rebellion as good as broke – no matter if the war does continue for months yet."¹³

Nine days later, the Battle of Bull Run demonstrated decisively that the conflict would last far longer and be more costly than most had imagined. Writing years later in *Memoranda during the War*, the collection of prose writings and "impromptu jottings" from his days serving in the hospital, the poet placed himself in the center of the action that day, although he was in reality far from the battle, living with his mother and family in Brooklyn and reading newspaper accounts:

Where are the vaunts, and the proud boasts with which you went forth? Where are your banners, and your bands of music, and your ropes to bring back your prisoners? Well, there isn't a band playing – and there isn't a flag but clings ashamed and lank to its staff... The sun rises, but shines not.

The men appear, at first sparsely and shame-faced enough – then thicker in the streets of Washington [...]. They come along in disorderly mobs, some in squads, stragglers, companies. Occasionally, a rare regiment, in perfect order, with its officers (some gaps, dead, the true braves,) marching in silence, with lowering faces, stern, weary to sinking, all black and dirty, but every man with his musket, and stepping alive; – but these are the exceptions [...]. The principal hotel, Willard's, is full of shoulder-straps – thick, crush'd creeping with shoulder-straps. (I see them, and must have a word with them. There you are, shoulder-straps! – but where are your companies? where are your men? Incompetents! [...]) I think this is your work, this retreat, after all. Sneak, blow, put on airs there in Willard's sumptuous parlors and bar-rooms, or anywhere – no explanation shall save you.¹⁴

This passage does more than reveal Bull Run's staggering blow to Northern confidence; it also captures many of the qualities that mark Whitman's poetry and prose. In the 1855 poem, retitled "Song of Myself" in later editions of *Leaves of Grass*, the speaker describes the suffering at the scene of a steamship disaster and remarks, "All this I swallow and it tastes good. . . . I like it well, and it becomes mine, / I am the man. . . . I suffered. . . . I was there."¹⁵ This poetic practice of thrusting himself into the scene, whether it be the bridal bed or the battlefield, here extends to the poet's description of Bull Run, written nearly fifteen years after the event, and allows Whitman to watch the retreating soldiers with pity and appreciation and to confront the officers that he holds responsible for the rout. It is only several lines later that he adds, parenthetically, "Of all the days of the War, there are two especially that I can never forget. Those were the day following the news, in New York and Brooklyn, of that first Bull Run defeat, and the day of Abraham Lincoln's death. I was home in Brooklyn on both occasions."¹⁶ Repeatedly in his writings on the war, the poet would rely on a blend of newspaper stories, first-person accounts, empathy, and poetic imagination to bridge geographic divisions and place himself in the action.

In the months that followed Bull Run, however, the poet found the war and its effects moving ever closer. George reenlisted for a three-year stint, and his letters home reported on his battle experiences in considerable detail.¹⁷ The number of wounded increased, and in April 1862 Whitman visited soldiers recovering in hospitals in New York.¹⁸ But the war only truly hit home after Whitman and his mother read in a newspaper that George had been injured in the battle of Fredericksburg, and the poet set off to Virginia to find him.¹⁹ Although his brother's injury was not life threatening, the sights Whitman saw in his days in the hospitals affected him profoundly. His oft-quoted account of that initial encounter with the

brutal cost of the war and the troubling conditions in the hospitals, first published in an article for the *New York Times* in December 1864, illustrates the magnitude of suffering that he witnessed during those visits:

Began my visits (Dec. 21, 1862) among the camp hospitals in Army of the Potomac, under Gen. Burnside. Spent a good part of the day in a large brick mansion, on the backs of the Rappahannock, immediately opposite Fredericksburgh [sic]. It is used as a hospital since the battle, and seems to have received only the worst cases. Out doors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c., about a load for a one-horse cart. Several dead bodies lie near, each covered with its brown woolen blanket. In the door-yard, toward the river, are fresh graves mostly of officers, their names on pieces of barrel-staves or broken board, stuck in the dirt.

Even in this early writing, we see many of the concerns that would preoccupy the poet in both his hospital service and the literary work he produced in response. There is the graphic reminder of physical suffering, bodies reduced to pieces by injury and amputation, and the casual presence of death. Corpses lie on the ground without even makeshift coffins, and graves with impromptu markers announce their impermanence more clearly than the identities of the fallen. Whitman knows the name of the general in command of this army, knows the geographic location of the camp and the battleground, but the names of the men suffering and dying are absent. Such anonymity would forever trouble him. The poet spent the remainder of the war cataloging the names of soldiers rendered hospital patients – in his notebooks, in letters home, and in his journalism – and the rest of his life meditating on the significance of the fallen, particularly those unknown to him and the world. His Civil War writing, both his poetry and his prose, is in large part the record of his attempts to come to terms with the magnitude of loss that he first witnessed in this camp in December 1862.

In the short term, however, the poet's visit resulted in an almost immediate determination to remain near the front to help the wounded. His first letter home to his mother details how quickly Whitman made his plans. Following a description of his difficult journey to find George, the poet describes how all of his previous concerns vanished in the face of the realities of war:

[N]ow that I have lived for eight or nine days amid such scenes as the camps furnish, and had a practical part in it all, and realize the way that hundreds of thousands of good men are now living, and have had to live for a year or more, not only without any of the comforts, but with death and sickness and hard marching and hard fighting (and no success at

that,) for their continual experience – really nothing we call trouble seems worth talking about.²⁰

While the aftermath of Fredericksburg opened the poet's eyes, it also sealed his resolve: "I will stay here for the present, at any rate long enough to see if I can get any employment at any thing, and shall write what luck I have. Of course I am unsettled at present."

The sense of improvisation in these closing remarks belies the calculated way that the poet set about remaking himself as a resident of Washington, DC. In a gesture that equaled his shrewdness in sending Ralph Waldo Emerson a copy of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman reached out to the Concord celebrity once again, this time for a letter of reference and an introduction to Secretary of State Seward, Secretary of the Treasury Chase, and even Senator Charles Sumner.²¹ Emerson quickly obliged with a letter noting, "A man of [Whitman's] talents & dispositions will quickly make himself useful, and, if the government has work that he can do, I think it may easily find that it has called to its side more valuable aid than it bargained for."²² Although this particular effort did not bear fruit, Whitman was able to land a position as a clerk in the Army Payroll Office.²³ This would be the first in a series of governmental positions that the poet held throughout the 1860s until illness and a stroke in 1873 at last made it impossible for him to continue his employment.

While recent discoveries in the National Archive have revealed the extent of the poet's labors in his bureaucratic posts,²⁴ the majority of the poet's energy was spent helping the soldiers that he visited daily, recording and reflecting on his experiences in his notebooks, and working to support his volunteer efforts. A close examination of Whitman's correspondence during the war reveals the extent to which the poet's writing, both his private correspondence and published journalism, was done with an eye toward fundraising. From the very beginning of his voluntarism, Whitman received frequent contributions by mail from his brother Thomas Jefferson (Jeff) Whitman. An employee of the Brooklyn Water Works, Jeff actively solicited his coworkers for donations, and with an almost equal fervor, urged his brother to write letters directly to donors, to "keep an exact account of what it [the donated money] does and send them the particulars of just the good it does. I think it would assist them (and the rest of us) in collecting more."²⁵ This became a constant plea from Jeff for the duration of the war.

Although Whitman was ambivalent at best about following the course encouraged by his brother, the reality of his experience working as an

independent agent in a field dominated by the U.S. Sanitary Commission – which actively discouraged individual voluntarism – meant that he had to seek support from individual donors. Early on, the poet somehow secured an affiliation with the Sanitary Commission's most prominent competitor, the Christian Commission, in January 1863, but he persisted in describing himself in letters and articles as operating solely on his own, and there is no indication that he secured financial support from the Christian Commission.²⁶ This is evident in one of his earliest pieces of hospital journalism.²⁷ In "The Great Army of the Sick," published in February 1863, Whitman suggests the challenges of nursing the wounded and implies that he is now particularly well suited to the task:

Upon a few of these hospitals I have been almost daily calling as a missionary, on my own account, for the sustenance and consolation of some of the most needy cases of sick and dying men, for the last two months. One has much to learn in order to do good in these places. Great tact is required. These are not like other hospitals.²⁸

Later in the article, at the end of a lengthy description of the "Case of J.A.H., of Company C., Twenty-Ninth Massachusetts," Whitman offers this testimonial to his own "great tact": "H. told me I had saved his life. He was in deepest earnest about it. It was one of those things that repay a soldiers' hospital missionary a thousand-fold – one of the hours he never forgets."²⁹

While attesting to both the efficacy of his actions and their effect on him personally, this article is also one of the earliest examples of the complicated interplay between the poet's private and public writing about the war and the way that his hospital experiences shaped his subsequent poetry and prose. For example, more than a month before the article appeared, Whitman had written his sister-in-law Martha about J.A.H. in what almost appears to be an earlier draft of the published work. Even more significantly, in a letter to Emerson acknowledging the latter's letters of introduction, Whitman revealed how, within a month of his time in Washington, he had already begun imagining the literary work that would emerge from the experience:

I desire and intend to write a little book out of this phase of America, her masculine young manhood, its conduct under most trying of and highest of all exigency, which she, as by lifting a corner in a curtain, has vouchsafed me to see America, already brought to Hospital in her fair youth.

...

As I took temporary memoranda of names, items, &c of one thing and another, commissioned to get or do for the men – what they wished

and what their cases required from outside, &c – these memoranda grow bulky, and suggest something to me – so I now make fuller notes, or a sort of journal, (not a mere dry journal though, I hope) – This thing I will record – it belongs to the time, and to all the States – (and perhaps it belongs to me) –³⁰

In addition to planning to write “a little book” capturing the vision of America that the war revealed, the poet also quickly saw that his notes – intended at first simply to remind him of names, bed numbers, and aid requests – would eventually take on a different form, although he himself seemed uncertain of what “this thing” would be.

In the years that followed, the poet would more than make good on these plans. In his poetry, the small book of poetry *Drum-Taps* (and the second issue with *Sequel to Drum-Taps*), published soon after the war’s end, would express the vision of comradeship, the soul, and the nation that Whitman found in the struggle. Ten years after the war, the poet would collect his memoranda and short articles into *Memoranda During the War*: a “sort of journal” that chronicles the poet’s experiences and thoughts through the war and its aftermath. Most profoundly, however, the poet would fold *Drum-Taps* into *Leaves of Grass* beginning with the 1867 edition, and from that moment onward, the war would be inextricably linked to Whitman’s work.

When *Drum-Taps* appeared in 1865, critics were well aware of the poet’s tireless efforts in the hospitals, and their appraisal of the verse occasionally combined a review of the literature itself with commentary on his voluntarism. His friend John Burroughs set the tenor for this sort of appraisal in his early review of *Drum-Taps*, noting that the volume “is the result of the poet’s experience in army and in the hospitals.”³¹ The generally positive response to the collection that appeared in the staid *North American Review* echoed these sentiments, mingling a recognition of the controversy over the poet’s earlier verse with an acknowledgment of the setting that had inspired these newest works: “He is not ashamed of the body he lives in, and he calls all things by plain names. His compositions, without being sentimental or pretty, show genuine sensibility to the beauty of nature and of man. His braggart patriotism evinced its genuineness during the war. The fact that the ‘songs’ were written under such circumstances [while Whitman “nourished the wounded and soothed many a dying soldier”] ought to have rebutted in the most fastidious minds whatever presumption may have been raised against the volume by previous publications.”³²

If the war proved the “genuineness” of the poet’s “braggart patriotism,” it also provided the occasion for Whitman to return to many other

prominent themes of his earlier poetry, which found expression in the stories that soldiers shared with him as he sat at their bedsides. The poem "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," for example, and the speaker's expression of love and grief for "my son and my soldier," "boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding),"³³ offers an intimate example of the "manly attachment" that is expressed most fully in the "Calamus" cluster of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*.³⁴ The poem is not simply an extension of Whitman's poetic imagination or preoccupations, however. As Martin Murray demonstrates, its source is a direct account of a relationship between a soldier and his fallen comrade that Whitman heard while in the hospital in Washington, DC.³⁵

This intersection between the poet's craft and a soldier's experience is perhaps most vividly on display in "A March in the Ranks Hard-Press'd, and the Road Unknown." In the poem, the speaker, a soldier in a retreating army, comes on a makeshift hospital set up in a church and encounters "a sight beyond all the picture and poems ever made."³⁶ Inside, torches, candles, and lamps provide a dim light that reveals the suffering of the wounded and the efforts of the surgeons, but most of all "the crowd, O the crowd of the bloody forms, the yard outside also fill'd."³⁷ While the speaker shares a moment of connection with one of these "groups of forms" – "a mere lad, in danger of bleeding to death"³⁸ – that moment is completely transitory, and the speaker's horrified reverie is interrupted by the order to resume the march:

But first I bend to the dying lad, his eyes open, a half-smile gives he me,
Then the eyes calmly close, and I speed forth to the darkness,
Resuming, marching, ever in darkness marching, on the in ranks,
The unknown road still marching.³⁹

The poet's notebook from his hospital visits in 1863 provides a vivid example of how Whitman drew on the experiences of the soldiers to shape and inform his verse. He writes, "scene in the woods on the peninsula – told me by Milton Roberts, ward G (Maine) after the battle of White Oaks church, on the retreat, the march at night – the scene between 12 and 2 o'clock that night at the church in the woods, the hospital show at night."⁴⁰ The language that follows this introduction is strikingly similar to that included in the poem, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain how much of the description of the "hospital show," in either the notebook or the poem, is Whitman's or Roberts's. However, as the poet continues to write in his notes, the first-person "me" who hears this story slips into the "we" who was present at the church: "we retreating the Artillery horses

feet muffled. orders that men should tread lightly and speak in whispers – Then between 12[struck out]^{midnight} & 1 oclock we halted to rest a couple of hours at an opening in the woods.”⁴¹ Is this transcription or the first draft of the poem that followed? The remaining notebook lines feature the graphic details of the hospital setting and the smells, sights, and sounds of the smoky darkness – descriptions that would appear in the final poem.

One of the apparent innovations of “A March in the Ranks” is the encounter with the dying soldier that is the emotional center of the piece. There is no counterpart in the notebook, and the moment when the speaker pauses to “stanch the blood temporarily”⁴² is likely drawn from the poet’s own experiences at the side of bleeding and dying patients. His most complete poetic expression of such voluntarism is found in the poem “The Dresser,” retitled “The Wound-Dresser” beginning in 1876.⁴³ The poem is set years in the future and presents the speaker as an old man, answering children’s queries about his time during the war. The questions cause him to reflect on how his work in the hospitals transformed his early enthusiasm, offering a poetic response to earlier works like “Beat! Beat! Drums!”: “(Arous’d and angry, I’d thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war, / But soon my fingers fail’d me, my face droop’d and I resign’d myself, / To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead).”⁴⁴ He then invites the reader to follow him into the hospital, describing what he saw and did at the bedsides of the wounded in vivid present tense. The poem ends with a vision of affection that once again evokes the same-sex affection of the “Calamus” cluster: “(Many a soldier’s loving arms about this neck have cross’d and rested / Many a soldier’s kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)”⁴⁵ Paired with the enthusiastic poems of 1861, “The Wound-Dresser” demonstrates how profoundly the war years influenced Whitman’s feelings about the conflict.

As 1865 began, Whitman expressed great satisfaction with *Drum-Taps*, his collection of war poems: “It is in my opinion superior to *Leaves of Grass* – certainly more perfect as a work of art, being adjusted in all its proportions. . . . But I am perhaps mainly satisfied with *Drum-Taps* because it delivers my ambition of the task that has haunted me, namely, to express in a poem . . . the pending action of this *Time & Land we swim in*.”⁴⁶ While he may have imagined *Drum-Taps* as his perfected poetic statement on the events that he heard about or witnessed, events quickly and dramatically overtook him. Four months after Whitman wrote these words, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

It would be difficult to overestimate the effect of the president’s death on the poet, although the subsequent material form of *Drum-Taps*

reflects Whitman's state of mind as effectively as anything he wrote. The first appearance of the volume included only one short poem mentioning Lincoln's death, "Hush'd be the Camps To-day." But rather than widely distribute the book, Whitman quickly wrote *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, a collection of poems with the parenthetical subtitle "(Since the Preceding Came from the Press)" that includes his most famous poetic statements on the president's death, "O Captain, My Captain," and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." These additional poems were stitched into the back of the existing copies of *Drum-Taps*, producing a strange volume including two sets of poems, each with its own cover page and pagination. Gone was the work so recently "adjusted in all its proportions." Instead, this irregular volume suggests Whitman's distressed determination to get his works on Lincoln into what was, at least in 1865, his definitive poetic reflection on and representation of the Civil War.

Whitman later folded the poems of *Drum-Taps* and its "sequel" into *Leaves of Grass* beginning with the 1867 edition, distributing them in different clusters with different titles before at last settling on a final arrangement in 1881. In this way he literalized his declaration in the 1871 poem "To Thee Old Cause," "my book and the war are one."⁴⁷ During the decade after Appomattox, the poet also prepared and published the other Civil War work that he had long imagined, the product of his notebooks and his personal records of the times. As early as 1863 he had proposed a memoir detailing his wartime experiences to James Redpath, publisher of Louisa May Alcott's popular fictionalized account of her service as a nurse, *Hospital Sketches*:

My idea is a book of the time, worthy the time – something considerably beyond mere hospital sketches . . . the premises or skeleton memoranda of incidents, persons, places, sights, the past year (mostly jotted down either on the spot or in the spirit of seeing or hearing what is narrated) . . . in some respects somewhat a combination in handling of the Old French Memoires, & my own personality (things seen through my eyes, & what my vision brings) – a book full of mosaic, but all fused to one comprehensive thing.⁴⁸

Remarkably, the volume that Whitman finally published ten years after the war's end, *Memoranda During the War*, largely followed this plan.⁴⁹ He writes in its introduction, "Of the present Volume most of its pages are *verbatim* renderings from such pencillings on the spot. Some were scratch'd down from narratives I heard and itemized while watching, or waiting, or tending somebody amid those scenes."⁵⁰ Much like *Drum-Taps*, *Memoranda* would continue to reappear in other volumes, as

Whitman folded it first into *Two Rivulets* in 1876 and then again (in an expanded and revised form) into his autobiography *Specimen Days and Collect* (1881–1882). This last iteration is particularly telling, for while the poet devotes no time at all to the initial composition and publication of *Leaves of Grass* – events one would surely expect the poet to see as defining moments – he places the war at the center of his life story.⁵¹

In an 1888 retrospective essay, “A Backward Glance o’er Travel’d Roads,”⁵² the poet declared of his service during the war, “Without these three or four years and the experiences they gave, ‘Leaves of Grass’ would not now be existing.”⁵³ While the declaration may appear hyperbolic or anachronistic, it speaks to a fundamental truth: the Civil War affected every aspect of Whitman’s life and work. In the decades that followed, the poet continually returned to the war in his poetry and prose, trying to capture and represent its truth in spite of his famous declaration in *Specimen Days*: “the real war will never get in the books.”⁵⁴ Whitman may have been frustrated by language’s inability to express the essence of the conflict, but he never abandoned his attempt to represent what he heard and saw and to preserve the memory of the fallen, even if their names were lost to history. Many years before, the poet proclaimed in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,”⁵⁵ and he aspired to be the American Bard who would sing that poem. He succeeded in a way he likely never imagined, for, like the nation that inspired it, Walt Whitman’s writing was forever transformed by the Civil War.

Notes

- 1 Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*, 7 vols., Edwin Haviland Miller (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1961–1964), vol. IV, p. 56. Hereafter *Corr.*
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 See Robert K. Nelson and Kenneth M. Price’s “Debating Manliness: Thomas Wentworth Higginson, William Sloane Kennedy, and the Question of Whitman,” *American Literature* 73.3 (2001), 497–524. Rpt. in Walt Whitman Archive. <http://whitmanarchive.org>, accessed 14 Nov. 2013.
- 4 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “Women and Men. War Pensions for Women,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (5 March 1887), 162.
- 5 Walt Whitman, *Prose Works*, 2 vols., Floyd Stovall (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1963–1964), vol. I, p. 23. Hereafter *PW*.
- 6 *Corr.*, vol. I, p. 56.
- 7 Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 11.

- 8 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Comprehensive Reader's Edition, Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (eds.) (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 283. Hereafter *LG*.
- 9 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 57.
- 10 *LG*, p. 282.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 110 and 366.
- 12 *PW*, vol. I, pp. 25–26.
- 13 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 57.
- 14 *PW*, vol. I, pp. 27–29.
- 15 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1855, Whitman Archive. <http://whitmanarchive.org>, accessed 14 Nov. 2013.
- 16 *PW*, vol. I, p. 31.
- 17 See, for example, George Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, 9 Feb. 1862, Whitman Archive. <http://whitmanarchive.org>.
- 18 Loving, *Walt Whitman*, p. 11.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 20 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 59.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 23 Beginning with his journey to find George, Whitman's life in Washington DC. has been well documented. For a detailed account of the poet's early efforts to secure lodging and employment in Washington, see Loving, pp. 17–18. More recently, Ted Genoways has done a great deal to shed light on Whitman's time in Washington in *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
- 24 See Kenneth M. Price, "Whitman, Walt, Clerk," *Prologue* 43 (Winter 2011), 24–32.
- 25 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 66.
- 26 How Whitman became a delegate with the Christian Commission remains a mystery. As one historian notes, "Christian Commission leaders listed the three essential skills necessary for agents to be successful as 'preaching, business, and working.' Preaching was seen as the most important quality." Theresa R. McDevitt, *Fighting for the Soul of America: A History of the United States Christian Commission*, Diss., Kent State University, 1997, p. 140.
- 27 Ted Genoways notes the piece seems intended to raise money. See "Memoranda of a Year (1863): Whitman in Washington, D.C.," *Mickle Street Review* 17/18 (2005). <http://micklestreet.rutgers.edu>, accessed 14 Nov. 2013.
- 28 *PW*, vol. 1, p. 296.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- 30 *Corr*, vol. I, pp. 69–70.
- 31 John Burroughs, "Walt Whitman And His 'Drum Taps,'" *Galaxy* 2 (1 Dec. 1866), 606–615. Rpt. in Whitman Archive. <http://whitmanarchive.org>, accessed 14 Nov. 2013.
- 32 A. S. Hill, "[Review of *Drum-Taps*]," *North American Review* 104 (Jan. 1867), 301–303. Rpt. in Whitman Archive. <http://whitmanarchive.org>, accessed 14 Nov. 2013.

- 33 *LG*, p. 304.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 35 Martin G. Murray, "Responding Kisses: New Evidence about the Origins of 'Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night,'" *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 25.4 (2008), 192–197. Rpt. in Whitman Archive <http://whitmanarchive.org>, accessed 14 Nov. 2013.
- 36 *LG.*, p. 305.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 306.
- 40 "[scene in the woods on]" manuscript, Whitman Archive. <http://whitmanarchive.org>, accessed 14 Nov. 2013.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *LG*, p. 305.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 309.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *LG*, p. 311.
- 46 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 246.
- 47 *LG*, p. 4.
- 48 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 171.
- 49 Whitman published a small run of the book in 1875, including within it material that had been published in newspapers during the war itself and in 1874. He then published *Memoranda* again in 1876 in the volume of poetry and prose *Two Rivulets*. See Robert Leigh Davis, "Memoranda During the War [1875–76]" in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (eds.) (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), pp. 423–424.
- 50 *PW*, vol. I, p. 2.
- 51 Murray has pointed out that the decade after the war is also notably absent from the poet's autobiography. See "*Specimen Days*" in *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, Donald D. Kummings (ed.) (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), p. 560.
- 52 This essay is a compilation of four earlier essays with publication dates stretching back to 1884. *LG*, p. 561.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 570.
- 54 *PW*, vol. I, p. 116.
- 55 *PW*, vol. II, p. 434.

War and the Art of Writing: Emily Dickinson's Relational Aesthetics

Shira Wolosky

The Suburbs of a Secret
A Strategist should keep – (Fr, 1171)¹

Emily Dickinson's poetry as a paradigm lyric offers a map of critical history. Exemplary to each succeeding methodological approach, she marks the progress from critical movement to critical movement. To formalists she is formal; to feminists she is gendered; to biographers she is personal; to cultural studies she is culturally constituted. But Dickinson's poetry also challenges these methodological divisions, pointing instead to a revision of aesthetics as *relational theory*. Art, rather than being defined in terms of any one of these parameters, emerges as exactly the ongoing inter-conjunction and trajectory of multiple engagements. This is not to dismiss or declare illegitimate any specific avenue of entry into Dickinson's texts or to deny that one element in a work may take priority over others; it is only to insist that no one of them will either exhaust her art or even fully address it. Indeed, it is the measure of her artistic reach that her texts yield to each of these and other approaches (historicist, religious, visual, manuscriptal, gendered, romanticist, and so on) but only fully emerges through their interrelationality. This interrelationality is what constitutes the aesthetic as such: not any single dimension but the trajectorial courses of many dimensions that the artwork brings into conjunction and also disjunction, confirmation, and conflict, and myriad other changing relationships.²

Such a relational aesthetic offers an important intervention into the historicist-cultural studies that are prominent today. Historicism of course came late to Dickinson. Her reclusion, as well as gendered assumptions of female domesticity, relegated her with other women writers to private and not public spheres. The intense formalization of her texts likewise pointed critical attention inward, to textual composition and later to manuscript analysis. That her outburst in creative production began

with the American Civil War, during which about half of her poems were written, was strikingly occluded by these biographical, gendered, and textual foci.³ In recent decades, with the general rise of cultural studies, war and other historical-social contexts have come to be acknowledged and increasingly explored.⁴ Consequently, more and more Dickinson poems are being analyzed in the orbit of the war with its accompanying cultural, ideological, and technological issues. Yet the danger now is the occlusion of other aesthetic elements.⁵ The divided mind of historicist as against formalist hermeneutics continues its split life, with neither providing a full aesthetic theory that takes both (as well as other) dimensions into account as relational elements. All of these are what together constitute art in varying and shifting emphases, prominence, fissures, and fusions.

To chart relational aesthetics of multiple dimensions in intercrossing trajectories, it is useful to recall the Jakobsonian model that founded twentieth-century formalist theory. Roman Jakobson demarcated six constitutive functions of the artwork: addresser, context (reference), addressee, message (composition), contact, and code. He then famously identified the message composition as the properly aesthetic function. To be art the work had to subordinate all other functions to the compositional one, whose self-referential reflection on its own methods and components defined its truly and properly aesthetic status. This was the practice of New Criticism in the case of Dickinson as well.⁶ Feminist literary criticism then opened Dickinson into gendered frameworks of investigation, although those investigations often remained literary rather than more broadly social historical. The focus was largely restricted to representations of women in literary tradition and women's (lack of) access to it, or on inner psychoanalytic topographies, with historicity extending only as far as the operations of the literary marketplace in shaping publication practices.⁷ The move into cultural studies turned to what Jakobson called "context," not as direct historical reference, but as focused on a wide range of cultural practices as well as ideologies. The artwork is still largely referential (although also performative) but less to historical events than to ideological claims made by or about the writer's social milieu.

These mutually displacing methods suggest something like a boomerang effect: each limited to itself, circling around any other aesthetic elements without real contact. Formalist and purely theoretical treatments of Dickinson eliminated the social dimension of Dickinson's work; the cultural discussions that followed then tended to elide the textual constitution of the poem, along with the other poles Jakobson specified. Art, however, entails all of them; who is addressing whom, about what, and in

what terms and ways. To focus only on context, regardless of how thickly described, is to reduce the artwork to what amounts to a correspondence theory of language, where language is seen as a referential system to a reality prior to and external to it, whether this be history or ideology. Most twentieth century language theory has contested such a correspondence model, proposing instead various theories of relationality: between signifiers, as in Derridean deconstruction, or as language games of word usages in Wittgensteinian theory and pragmatist reflections. Cultural studies exceeds correspondence in its interest in discourse structures as themselves constituting social practices. Yet to the extent that the textual discussion is absorbed into cultural analysis – including ideological orders as constituting discourse – cultural studies can collapse text into illustration or demonstration, just as pure formalism absorbed all extratextual events and references into compositional units.

A full relational aesthetic will take into account the concerns of both formalist compositional attention and historical-cultural representation, along with other constitutive poles of the artwork. This is not to say that in some works some functions are not more commanding than others, more defining to the artwork or to the production or response to it. The relationships between poet and text, text and audience, each of these to ideology or event, can vary and also shift in priority in the experience of the artwork. This variation itself registers historical and cultural shifts and understandings. The artwork is a negotiation among each of its dimensions: with aesthetics itself exactly that scene of interreaction among them, as against the reduction or elevation of any single dimension to the exclusion of others. It is, of course, perfectly possible and also legitimate to treat a literary text as, say, a historical document, illustrating an event or movement or issue of history, or as an ideological or political reflection.⁸ But it is also to miss the poem's aesthetic power. Nor yet is eliminating the historical for pure composition the restoration or realization of what is truly aesthetic, as is assumed in long-standing formalist traditions. The aesthetic instead is exactly that intertrajectory of the historical and compositional, as well as the production and reception, transmission, and indeed code enacted in the text.

War drives the poles of art into more radical extremity, intensifying their tendency to split apart. On one side war is overwhelmingly historical and ideological. On the other, it calls up greater formal resistance to its disorders – the pressures from within resisting the pressures from without, as Wallace Stevens put it. This is the case for Emily Dickinson and the Civil War. War does not make Dickinson's poetry directly referential in

any sense of correspondence theory. Nor does contextual study exhaust her poetry's aesthetic event. Aesthetics necessarily entail not only historical or ideological context but also the relation between addresser and what is usually termed an *addressee*, but which is better called a *responder*. The formalist addressee suggests a passive reception, a static audience. This mutes the way the act of address shapes both addresser and responder – where the addresser in fact is also a responder, each always in his and her own histories, whether contemporaneous or across time, located in time and space and addressing/responding in terms of them. Artworks are not timeless but continuously timely, multiply situated in the histories of their production and reception, which are thus brought into mutual address. The aesthetic relation thus takes place within an ongoing kaleidoscope of historical and social, as well as biographical and psychological, interrelationality among its participants – in the contexts that situate them, but specifically through the formal compositions that constitute the event of their interchange. Other dimensions likewise enter in. As we have become increasingly aware through digitalization, Jakobson's "contact" is intrinsic to the event in that it does more than merely "transmit." Its role is not simply instrumental. The ways contact can be made, the speed and reproduction and modes of transmission made possible or necessary through technologies of circulation, all deeply shape compositional forms in construction and reception. This palpability of contact is vividly demonstrated in the new Civil War technologies, including photography, mass newspaper circulation, and other forms of communication and transportation as these effect art in Dickinson and elsewhere.

For Dickinson herself, contact was constituted through archiving as manuscript fascicle books, as well as circulation through letter coterie and depositing texts with Susan Gilbert Dickinson next door. Dickinson's refusal to publish is one of many signs of rupture in her writer/responder relationship. Nonpublication correlates with her truncated syntax and unmatched rhymes, ellipses and dashes in place of regular punctuation – the calculated gaps and drops of Dickinsonian stylistics. These inventions disrupt at once composition, address, and contact, and indeed code itself in its departures from grammatical norms and the insertion of lexical and syntactic ambiguities. Image structures also show cracks, with apparently aligned comparisons and correlations slipping into mismatch.⁹

Not all of these stylistic anomalies can be attributed to the ruptures of war. But war acts as a context for them both directly and as a matrix intensifying other challenges to cultural norms and interpretive paradigms. In Dickinson's period destabilized norms include religious structures and

gender models, as well as civil narratives between North and South, and industrial and technological changes that the Civil War itself both registered and accelerated. All of these place Dickinson in a period of intense testing of interpretive understandings. In science, as Thomas Kuhn traces, old paradigms are not relinquished before new paradigms are available to make sense of the anomalies left unexplained by older ones.¹⁰ In cultural life, accepted and traditional paradigms can persist alongside new ones, neither fully replaced nor coherently bridged or transmuted. Dickinson writes in and registers such paradigm gaps. Fragments of older terms strain her pages without connecting design, none entirely displaced but none entirely embraced, leaving her ambivalently caught between contesting claims and commitments and mutually subverting assumptions.

War serves as context/reference and also as stylistic, performative, and communicative matrix in Dickinson's ruptured discourses. How war intercrosses between the historical and the formal can be elucidated through Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Strauss proposes a model of writing that is at once formal and political. He interprets works as written in the face of political and ideological censorship that authors cannot openly defy. Instead, they resort to modes of indirection through which the writer signals his meanings only "between the lines," so as to remain undetected by coercive forces. Formally this indirection can be felt as "obscurity of plan, contradictions within one work or between one or more works by the author, omission of important links of the argument" and other stylistic inconsistencies.¹¹ In Strauss, such indirection constitutes an elitist esotericism that may exceed Dickinson's writing strategies.¹² But his model is suggestive as to how formal composition is already structured through historical and ideological settings, where response is not only a stylistic force but also a cognitive one, and which takes into account contact and circulation as well as form and author.

Dickinson's arduous verse remains caught between paradigms, doubting as "fervently" as she believes (Fr, 1449). In this excruciating ambivalence, she writes against the currents of most ideologies dominant around her. But she does so in ways that often remain concealed and indirect – reticent to engage in open challenge but inserting subversive positions realized haltingly through her textual strategies. Her many inconsistencies both within and between texts show her own changing positions in response to cultural paradigms that continue to frame her understandings, but of which she is not certain. These include gender roles and religious revival, both deeply entrenched in her period, as well as ideologies of war itself, as battlegrounds between variant versions of America. Tensions

explode between different senses of individual liberties on each side, where contesting Revolutionary legacies of freedom are claimed both in defense of slavery and in opposition to it, intensified by church schisms pitting religious traditions against themselves and each other and against rising secularization. The war itself, although fought in the name of liberty, curtailed freedom through military enlistment, discipline, and later conscription, subordinating personal autonomy to state necessities paradoxically imposed for freedom's sake. Scenes of mass death in massacres and disease effaced the individuality of death itself.

In sum, the Civil War contested and fragmented most American paradigms for self and nation. Dickinson's art of writing in this context puts pressure on language in its constitutions as formal, addressive, responsive, and transmissive, in combat yet also contact with the paradigms surrounding her at highest pitch. In formalist terms, textual attention reflects back on itself, resisting being treated as a mere instrumental carrier of a signified meaning to which it corresponds. But this compositional aspect is part of, not exclusive to, its historicity and circulation. In Straussian terms, the text enacts a crisis not *against* reference, as most New Critical and also theoretical readings pursue, but rather a crisis *within* reference – namely, the broad and also changing situation and assumptions in which the writings were produced and continue to be read and responded to. Each aesthetic level is situated within political and ideological constructions that generate and are shaped by historical events. This does not reduce to merely conducting and reflecting ideology, nor does it essentially deflect and resist ideology in a Foucauldian binary. Dickinson's is neither sheer complicity nor resolute resistance, but multiple engagements with the paradigms in which her texts operate: made and responding, produced and circulating, within political, ideological, social, cultural and literary matrices.

Recent work both on Dickinson and on the Civil War has provided much thicker descriptions of the cultural strata in which the poet wrote. Dickinson's death scenes can be placed within traditions of *ars moriendi*, which the Civil War horribly challenged: her imagined reunions among the dead in heaven, as in the much discussed "When I Was Small a Woman Died" (Fr, 518); her familiarity with war technology, as in her reference to the Minie ball in her letter to Louise Norcross on Frazar Stearns's death (Letters, 255); her sense of sudden death in the poems "That after Horror" (Fr, 243) and "If Any sink," which focuses "Dread" as the moment of "Whizzing, before the Ball" (Fr, 616).¹³ She likewise enters into imagined last thoughts of the dying, as in her poem "Success Is Counted Sweetest."¹⁴

Dickinson's work has been discussed in comparison with modes of representation around her, including journalism and photography, and in the context of popular poetry as a significant and pervasive mode of war response.¹⁵ And yet Dickinson is not a popular writer. Her work can only partly be accounted for through standard cultural modes. Her art of writing as rupture – in strenuous contest with cultural paradigms that she both resists and invests in – identifies with but also dissents from and exceeds cultural reference. Addresser and responder partly align but also miss one another. Hers is an anxiety of audience, and not simply in her womanhood, because plenty of women were publishing at great rates around her. Surely her evasions are intensified by the crisis in which the specific ideologies of war are ones she does not fully consent to, forcing her into an oblique address that equivocates in its relation to the core claims governing the experience of war around her. Hers is neither full convergence with nor full divergence from such paradigms. Instead, she registers the consequences of both rejection and acceptance and of the sense that overarching paradigms are fracturing. In Dickinson this is enacted not as complete repudiation and self-excision from contemporary American ideology – including war and its imperatives – but neither is hers full consent. In her war poetry we see Dickinson both attest to and combat her world.

Once the war is acknowledged as penetrating formal, address/response, contact, and other dimensions of Dickinson's poetry, more and more texts shift in meaning when read in military terms. War's interpretive force reaches beyond poems with direct reference to war to others with subtle associations and indirections. As she wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "The war seems an oblique place to me" (Letters, 280). Some poems, such as "Victory comes late," are clearly identified as Civil War poetry through its inclusion in letters written to Louise and Francis Norcross (Letters, 255) and to Samuel Bowles (Letters, 257) reporting utter shock that Frazar Stearns "is killed," "Two or three words of lead – that dropped so deep, they keep weighing."¹⁶

Victory comes late –
And is held low to freezing lips –
Too rapt with frost
To take it –
How sweet it would have tasted!
Just a Drop –
Was God so economical?
His Table's spread too high for Us –

[alternative: to mind it]

Unless we dine on Tiptoe –
 Crumbs – fit such little mouths –
 Cherries – suit Robins –
 The Eagle's golden breakfast – strangles – Them – [alternative: dazzles]
 God keep His Oath to Sparrows, [alternative: "Sparrows"]
 Who of little Love – know how to starve – (Fr, 195)¹⁷

Newbern, where Stearns died, was an important Union victory in 1862. But Dickinson declines, as she generally does, to register triumph or to appeal to integrative accounts and justifications. These include political and theological ones, closely intertwined in the political theologies of the American Civil War and civil religion at large. Here, "Victory" is declared, but there are no sides or celebration. It is "late" for Frazar Stearns, for any soldier killed, for Dickinson, and for her responders, here concretized or embodied in the letter's recipients. It is late in that it is beyond the experience of those who cannot benefit from it or even know the outcome. In Dickinsonian accounting, justification must occur on the same plane in time and space as what is being justified: gains must benefit those who have lost. Those who perished in battle, however, cannot "take it," or, in the variant "mind it" – that is, benefit from victory or understand the battle as victorious rather than merely deadly. The imagery then turns to concrete sensation, to taste and nourishment, which is likewise denied. A communion table is conjured, and then challenged: "Was God so Economical?" Economic language is always suspicious in Dickinson. Its prominence in American theological discourses goes back to the Puritans, as Max Weber famously proposed, but was further compromised in war contexts.¹⁸ As Dickinson writes in another widely discussed war elegy for Stearns, "It feels a Shame to be Alive:" "Do we deserve . . . that lives like Dollars – must be piled?" (Fr, 524).

"Was God so economical?" The form of question dramatizes the text as address, indeed as address/response to quite determinate positions in Dickinson's culture, including the culture of war. Dickinson is arguing, in a Straussian or indirect Bakhtinian polemic, with and against specific counter-positions, here the justification of sacrifice, as opposed to acknowledging and lamenting it. Dickinson's art of quotation is at once referential, formal, and intrinsic to her poetry's address/response. "God keep his vow to Sparrows" is one of her myriad biblical quotations (in the letter version, cited with quotations from Matthew 10:29–31) invoking providential care but in disappointment, not appeal. Quotation by definition marks the use of someone else's language. It places words in someone else's mouth, toward which the person quoting can have any number

of attitudes or purposes: agreement, confirmation, and authorization; and/or contest, parody, deflation, and assault. The words pass between voices, each with its own inflections, intentions, directions, and effects. Dickinson's quotations, perhaps especially her biblical ones, do not dismiss but also do not adopt, recirculating terms that are thus affirmed as potent but also as at cross-purposes.

The poem's battle-God is one of "little Love," a God of starvation, not communion and blessing. The lines "His Table's spread too high for Us / Unless we dine on tiptoe – " again removes the promised salvation from the condition requiring it. Note this poem's departure from hymnal structure, a rare thing in Dickinson. Hymnal form, popular among women writers, in Dickinson yields a very complex set of relations to audience and tradition, to paradigms and participation, and to deviation and distress. As with quotations, her hymnal forms at once invoke and revoke. Departures from its norms formalize, as here, the deep stress of Dickinson's attempt, and failure, to align event with paradigms supposed to place and explain experience. In a Straussian rupture of communicative norms, Dickinson apparently confirms, but actually also refuses and critiques reigning social narratives.

The goodness of God, the justification of evil, the healing power of nature, the interiority of conscience as moral intuition: all of these fundamental paradigms for interpreting experience and events are registered in Dickinson as fragile if not faulty. The very structures of language as grounded in a stable or shared reality or understanding are no longer secure in Dickinsonian representation, metaphysically or socially. "Freezing," a word Dickinson associates with death, may also here be a play on "Frazer." "Rapt," associated with ecstatic rapture, is here betrayed as assault on breath and life. The hymnal form itself becomes unstructured in a disruption of contact via expected cultural norms.¹⁹ War as reference structures imagery as well. Dickinson had previously established her identity with "Robins" when she placed herself like them as seeing "New Englandly" (Fr, 256). The golden Eagle surely invokes the American national icon. Here they stand against each other, the Eagle's breakfast, a figure for both providential care and nationalist ideology, remaining out of reach and unsuitable to the Robin.

The poem "Death is the supple Suitor" marks a further indirection yet also a further penetration by the orbit of war.

Death is the supple Suitor
That wins at last –
Conducted first

By pallid innuendoes
 And dim approach
 But brave at last with Bugles
 And a bisected Coach
 It bears away in triumph
 To Troth unknown
 And Pageants as impassive [alternative: Kindred as responsive]
 As Porcelain

[Alternative:
 And Kinsmen as divulgeless
 As throngs/Clans of Down] (Fr, 1470, 1878)²⁰

"Victory comes late" had little apparent engagement with gender. The "Robin" image, however, suggests feminization, in its diminution, and its gendering as "Queen" in other poems (Fr, 256, 501). "Death is the supple Suitor" is more directly gendered. The masculinity of "Suitor" recalls "Because I could not Stop for Death" – a male escort in a creepy, terminal courtship, as this poem puts it, "To Troth Unknown." Here, too, there is a victory of sorts, but it is death's: "that wins at last." This funeral scene is not specified as military. "Kindred" (Kinsmen in one variation) like "Porcelain" (another variant) concludes the poem with a domestic turn. Here the mourners are formal, ceremonial, and reified – frozen, as if by inner grief, almost themselves turned into tombs. "Brave at last as Bugles," however, sounds a specifically military note. Historically associated with the military, bugles emerged with special prominence during the Civil War.²¹ Funerals with bugles tend to be those of soldiers, casting a military shadow over this text whose central image system remains that of gendered courtship. "Bisected Coach" is a startling image, gaining added force if aligned with war. Rhetoric of the divided nation was pervasive throughout the period. Here such division is figured not as a house but as a carriage. As carriage, both container (a casket?) and conduct are rendered unstable and ambiguous. Only the end in death seems assured.

The point here is not to claim this poem is "about" war in a referential way. What the text turns on and around is rather an exchange of terms between private and public, women's and men's positions, and personal and collective events. "Pallid innuendos" applies to the communication of this text as well, in its imagery of gendered courtship with death and porcelain made into tomblike states or slabs, so that deadliness infuses domesticity. What the bravery of bugles announces is a demise through a verse

irregular even by Dickinsonian standards. Even off-rhymes are largely lacking, with only “approach/coach” and more evasively “Unknown/Porcelain” rhyming at all. The final image is one of interruption. The “Kindred” are no longer “responsive,” a break in possibility of address/response that the poem, in its own extreme indirection, both incarnates and enacts.

“A Tooth upon our Peace” seems even further removed from the orbit of war:

A Tooth [o]pon Our Peace
 The Peace cannot deface –
 Then Wherefore be the Tooth?
 To vitalize the Grace –
 The Heaven hath a Hell –
 Itself to signalize –
 And every sign before the Place
 Is gilt with Sacrifice – (Fr, 694, 1863)

Written in 1863, the poem speaks not of war but of peace – “Peace” as elusive, threatened, corroded. “Hell” is commonly associated with war, as in Tennyson’s well-known “Charge of the Light Brigade:”

Boldly they rode and well,
 Into the jaws of Death,
 Into the mouth of Hell

But against Tennyson’s “When can their glory fade?” Dickinson’s focus remains on hell and suffering. Tooth imagery here denotes both gnawing and pain. The core of Dickinson’s text is the rupture of paradigm by event. Instead of pattern absorbing event into its larger design – as part into whole, loss into gain, test into confirmation, trial into strength, error into education – in Dickinson anomaly, pain, loss, and intrusion threaten to unravel the paradigm that is supposed to contain, place, and give them meaning.

The topic of interpretation is announced in this poem in the terms “signalize” and “sign.” Its theological senses come in through the term “grace,” traditionally made visible in sacramental signs, essentially that of Christ’s sacrifice. “Sacrifice” indeed is one of the most key of all key words in Civil War paradigms, crucial to the attempt to make sense of and justify its unforeseen and unmeasured bloodshed. In sacrifice, the religious and the political intersect. American civil religion, which had extreme urgency in the Civil War, entails the state claiming meanings

that had been hitherto in the domain of religion. As Paul Kahn argues in *Putting Liberalism in Its Place*, the nation state absorbed the religious model in claiming for itself the

historical presence of an experience of ultimate meaning. For the individual, participation in the life of the nation gives a dimension of depth [and] experience of a fundamental meaning that transcends the ordinary ... Shared belief in ultimate meaning secures for the state as for the church the power of faith.

This shift from religion to state of the “claim of ultimate meaning for the individual citizen” also shifted the “domain of sacrifice” from religion to patriotism. “The nation state becomes entitled to demand of every citizen that he or she sacrifice the self for the continued existence of the state ... the modern state coopts the act of sacrifice to its own ultimate end.” This then allows the “extension of the battlefield to the entire territory of the state.”²² This claim of the state on all its citizens blurs the differences between combatants and noncombatants, as indeed occurred for the first time in Sherman’s march to the sea, which burned all in its wake. As Drew Faust sums up, “sacrifice and state became inextricably intertwined” in the Civil War. The theodicean need for justification took shape around the sense of “soldier’s deaths, like Christ’s sacrifice become the vehicle of salvation” and “the means for a terrestrial political redemption.”²³

In a poem such as “It feels a Shame to be Alive,” Dickinson’s image of Frazar Stearns as “Pawn for liberty” registers the paradox that in the Civil War, the self is called to sacrifice itself in the name of its own liberty.²⁴ In “A Tooth upon our Peace,” suffering is set in a traditional structure as meant “to vitalize the grace.” Is this to say that without suffering and death grace itself would lack life? That suffering is necessary to salvation is an old Christian trope in which suffering is not only justified and redeemed but is also essential to redemption. As John Brown proclaimed: without the shedding of blood there is no redemption from sin. But then, how would heaven and hell be distinguished from each other, if the second serves as a sign for the first?

Dickinson’s terse text offers an almost abstract version of core paradigms for interpreting events, not least events of suffering and trauma, including war – these are teeth upon our peace. Suffering, violence, conflict – these are the materials that cultural paradigms structure and explain, the “signs” to be interpreted through their frameworks and patterns. Dickinson makes these paradigms visible in her contest with

them, a contest that crosses through all the dimensions and elements that art assembles and enacts. Through reference, diction, and meter, the poems bring religious and historical contexts into complex relation to each other. Dickinson's verse shows suffering is at once the most personal and yet the most public of experiences. The meaning of suffering always depends on shared paradigms, which place it in wider frameworks of values and understanding. In this poem, words that seem private connect to surrounding discourses, including those of war, such as peace and sacrifice, grace and hell. These contextual references are, however, also compositional, through (hymnal) meter, (part)-rhyme, diction, dashes, and puns. Implied audiences are addressed but also kept distant, as shared hymnal meter and Christian terms are both offered and retracted, while any historical indication remains at most oblique. Nonetheless, 1863, the year of this poem's composition, is also the year of the Gettysburg Address, with its powerful construction of civil religion through sacrifice, transferred to a broader vision of America. Dickinson's work continues to reside within such paradigms. Often her anguish is at the failure of those paradigms to account for the mysteries they are meant to place and justify. As she wrote of war to her Norcross cousins: "I wish one could be sure that the suffering had a loving side" (Letters, 263). Dickinson thus continues to assume there is a "loving side," to invoke paradigm expectations, the disappointment of which causes her acute distress. Her poems enact, in Straussian ways of indirection, this appeal/denial of paradigms: her textual disruptions are often strategic, her work is ambiguous and kept secret and unpublished, with most poems not even circulated in letters. In aesthetic terms, Dickinson's poems register crisis between addresser and responder in terms of both shared frameworks and contact transmission; within a historical context of war interpreted as fulfilling religious patterns in political and social terms, but which seemed to her instead to challenge meaning, violently betraying the redemption promised. These tensions structure her compositional practices of interference in syntax, meter, and punctuation. (One wonders whether her dashes, among other things, echo the new telegraphic communication through which the war was conducted.) The destabilization of meaning itself converges in this poem's concluding pun: *gilt/guilt*. Promised reward is intimately tied to a guilt that may be mere "gilt," specious rather than precious, conjuring a value to and through sacrifice that lures to suffering but fails to give it meaning. This and other formal, compositional elements cannot be separated from the history and ideology that the poem addresses, with the

aesthetic inextricable from the ongoing interplay among its historical, political, compositional, encoded, transmissional, addressive/responsive, and other multiple dimensions.

Notes

- 1 References to Dickinson poems are to R. W. Franklin (ed.), *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, variorum edition (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), cited by Franklin's poem number.
- 2 Shira Wolosky, *Feminist Theory Across Disciplines: Feminist Community and American Women's Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2013) argues for a relational feminist poetics.
- 3 See Shira Wolosky, *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984) for a full-length discussion. See also Shira Wolosky, *Poetry and Public Discourse* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).
- 4 Even a book concerned with political issues, such as Karen Sanchez-Eppler's *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) turns history into metaphor, claiming Dickinson "fashioned into a poetic, ahistorical, ontological dilemma" what becomes a "nationless, fleshless, ahistorical liberty," pp. 106–107.
- 5 For discussion of the tensions between formalism and culture studies, see Shira Wolosky, "Formal, New and Relational Aesthetics: Dickinson's Multitexts" in *American Impersonal*, Branka Arsic (ed.) (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).
- 6 Roland Hagenbuchle reviews New Critical and other approaches to Dickinson in "Dickinson and Literary Theory" in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbuchle, and Cristanne Miller (eds.) (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998) 356–384, although he does not mention the Civil War.
- 7 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979) inaugurated this critical direction, but the very title illustrates the continued paradigm of female self-enclosure.
- 8 Timothy Sweet's *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) focuses on representation between text or photograph and its referent in ways that largely absorb reader and author into form, as an "oscillation between the signified embodiment and referent," p. 37.
- 9 Shira Wolosky, "Being in the Body," *Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, Wendy Martin (ed.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 10 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 11 Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), p. 36.
- 12 Betsy Erkkila argues for Dickinson's elitism in social senses in "Dickinson and the Art of Politics" in *The Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*, Vivian Pollak (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 136–137, 161.

- 13 *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas Johnson (ed.) (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), hereafter cited as Letters followed by letter number.
- 14 Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), on war technology, p. 41; also pp. 6, 180, 41, 18, 10; See Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861–1865*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), which describes the many poetic attempts to give “voice to dying soldiers’ thoughts,” p. 100.
- 15 Of special note is Faith Barrett, *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave Am Poetry and the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 2012), which places Dickinson in the thick culture of other Civil War poetry, scrapbook and album production, songs, etc., importantly emphasizing problems of address. See also Eliza Richards’ series of essays including “How News Must Feel When Traveling’: Dickinson and Civil War Media” in *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*, Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz (eds.) (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 157–180, and “Death’s Surprise, Stamped Visible” Emily Dickinson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Civil War Photography,” *Amerikastudien: A Quarterly* 54.1 (2009), 13–33.
- 16 Note the association of “lead” with “words;” perhaps bringing “I Felt a Funeral in my Brain” (Fr, 340) into the war orbit, as others have suggested. See also “Over and Over like a Tune” (Fr, 406) (1862).
- 17 This poem appears in Dickinson Archive to Packet XXIV, Fascicles 40 (part) and 34 (part) written dated ca. 1862–1864, although listed in Franklin under the section of 1861. http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/75416 But it was also sent to Samuel Bowles in 1862 in a letter concerning Frazar Stearns’ death (Letters, 257), which it therefore is presumably meant to address, with variants as marked above from the text of the letter.
- 18 Faust cites Horace Bushnell, for example, declaring the slain to be “the price and purchase-money of our triumph,” p. 190.
- 19 Victoria Morgan, *Emily Dickinson and Hymn Culture* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), emphasizes the communal power of hymns, but this is something Dickinson’s stylistics quite disrupt. See also Shira Wolosky, “Rhetoric or Not: Hymnal Tropes in Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts,” *New England Quarterly* LXI.2 (June, 1988), 214–232.
- 20 The manuscript offers a number of alternatives, see the fascicle images here: http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/79499, accessed Feb. 2013.
- 21 Faust lists as key words in Dickinson related to war trumpets, along with flags, bayonets, cavalry, drums, artillery, soldiers, and ammunition, *Republic*, p. 204. Funeral Taps” was first composed in the Civil War in 1863 and spread widely. See “The Winds went out their martial ways” (Fr, 1164) and “There came a Wind like a Bugle” (Fr, 1618).
- 22 Paul Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in its Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 86, 90–92. Of course, there is a large scholarship on civil religion.

- 23 Faust, *Republic*, pp. xiii, 188–189. See also Wolosky, *Voice of War*, pp. 44–45, 64–70. Alice Fahs similarly cites the Protestant “promise of salvation through suffering,” as the major form of consolation, p. 141. “The dead bodies of soldiers became vehicles for a new sentimentalism that fused patriotism and Christianity,” pp. 93–94.
- 24 Cristanne Miller discusses the meanings of liberty in *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), pp. 150–151.

*Herman Melville and the Civilian Author**Milette Shamir*

Herman Melville sat the war out. Forty-one at the start of hostilities and suffering from physical and emotional infirmities, he never joined the fighting and never directly contributed to the war effort as a civilian. Nor did he ever catch more than a fleeting glimpse of combat action. Nevertheless, his interest in the war was intense. From his safe vantage points in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and New York City, Melville formed diverse opinions about the conflict, and he chose to express them in poetic form. *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866) – a collection of seventy-one poems and one prose “Supplement” composed mostly in the aftermath of the fall of Richmond – contains Melville’s complex thoughts on the bloody events of 1861–1865. Melville justifies the war while denouncing its violence, exalts its heroes while demystifying the martial ideal, and demonizes the enemy only to identify with his suffering. He locates slavery, “man’s foulest crime,” at the root of the conflict, yet all but ignores African Americans as agents in it. He describes the North’s victory as a divinely decreed triumph of “Right” over “Wrong,” but argues for a pragmatic agenda of reconciliation.¹ And this assortment of sentiments, ranging from “patriotic” to “treasonous” (as Melville’s contemporaries understood the terms), is presented to the public not from the perspective of a soldier or a witness to the fighting but from that of a “concerned civilian.”²

Melville’s distance from the fields of combat is frequently mentioned by critics. It is the implicit theme, for example, of the most comprehensive study of his war years, Stanton Garner’s *The Civil War World of Herman Melville* (1993), which moves back and forth in space to highlight the contrast between Melville’s relatively unruffled domestic life in the North and the perils encountered by his cousin Colonel Henry Gansevoort who fought in the Southern front. As another critic put it, Gansevoort military exploits were, for Melville, “a source of family apprehensiveness, masculine envy, and ultimately access to an experience he

was conscious of missing.”³ Like many other men of his generation who stayed home, Melville must have suffered some wounds to his masculine pride and conscience.

But in his case it was not just as a man but also as an author that distance from the battles felt debilitating. Melville’s early literary success, after all, was largely owing to the use he had made of his hair-raising adventures as a sailor in the South Seas. It is as the “man who lived among cannibals” that he first gained authority to speak in public, and in his first novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) he used this authority to express controversial views against enslavement and military violence and for cross-racial brotherhood. Although Melville soon moved away from autobiographical writing, he nevertheless continued to use his maritime reputation and experiences as backdrop to works that were often critical of bondage and war, such as *Mardi* (1849), *White Jacket* (1850), and “Benito Cereno” (1855). Significantly, it is from the position of a witness-survivor that Ishmael narrates the horrific outcome of single-minded fixation and human exploitation in Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851).

But now, in writing about the Civil War (the outbreak of which he may have foretold in the Pequod’s hurtle toward destruction), Melville had to substitute newspaper reports and tales of returning soldiers for firsthand experience. How restrictive this mediation must have been for the writer is demonstrated, by way of contrast, in the one poem in *Battle-Pieces* that is based on action he had witnessed. “The Scout toward Aldie” is the product of Melville’s April 1864 visit to cousin Henry at a cavalry camp in northern Virginia. His purpose, the troop’s clergymen later wrote, was “to learn something of the *soldier’s* life and to see a little campaigning with his own eyes, preparatory to the writing of the book which appeared two years later.”⁴ During the visit, Melville was invited to join a scouting expedition in pursuit of confederate guerilla fighter John Singleton Mosby. The three-day mission failed, but the resulting thirty-page ballad, constituting an autonomous section of *Battle-Pieces*, stands out for its expansiveness and vivid plot details. It is as if participation in the pursuit of the legendary southern renegade, brief and thwarted as it was, released some block in Melville’s creative conduits.

Battle-Pieces, then, is not only about the war but also about the challenge of writing about a war one did not directly experience. This challenge needs to be placed in a wider cultural context. By the 1860s, the reading public had long been crediting autobiographical and testimonial writing with surplus authority and truthfulness – as the author of *Typee* and *Omoo* had discovered. This trust in the authority of experience was

reflected, for example, in the popularity of slave narratives; no tool in the abolitionist arsenal was deemed more effective than the accounts of the slaves themselves. The phenomenal success of both Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of 1000 Witnesses* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was largely a result of their purported reliance on first-person accounts of the South. By the time the war had begun, readers were conditioned to accept that narratives written by special news correspondents to the battles, or, better yet, by the soldiers themselves, have a truth value that no home-front perspective could match.⁵ But the authority of civilian writers was problematized also in another sense. The Civil War gave rise to discussions about the legitimacy of *ethical* positions expressed by civilians. That conflict witnessed the first modern effort to define the protection of civilians in codes of war in the context of the controversy over the combatant status of southern fighters and of the policy of "total war" in which civilians became legitimate targets. The emergent definition of "civilian" included the criterion of loyal sentiment, meaning that manifest disloyalty became grounds for loss of civilian reprieve. This discourse framed and troubled the noncombatant writer's ability to freely express a range of ethical positions about the conflict.

Such doubts over the civilian's ability to write about war help illuminate several features of Melville's poetry as he struggled to ground his authority and express his sometimes heterodox sentiments on the conflict. They also help account for the lukewarm or indifferent response these poems have, until recently, mostly elicited in readers. Edmund Wilson's oft-quoted dismissal of *Battle-Pieces* as a "chronicle of the patriotic feelings of an anxious middle-aged non-combatant as, day by day, he reads the bulletins from the front" is a sign of the persistence of this response well into the twentieth century.⁶ Melville's volume is intriguing, however, not least for inviting questions precisely about such aspects of the war as civilian anxiety, textual mediation, and patriotic feelings.

There is nothing self-evident in the assumption that the combatant's account of the war has the highest truth value. It is possible to argue that the fighting soldier's restricted point of view, scant access to information, and traumatizing experiences in fact undermine the creditability of his account. Yet during the Civil War, this assumption became entrenched. That is how, for instance, a poet as mediocre as Henry Howard Brownell could be crowned "Our Battle-Laureate" by Oliver Wendell Holmes. The fact that Brownell took part in the naval fighting he described in the popular *Lyrics of a Day; or, Newspaper Poetry by*

a Volunteer in the United States Service (1864) was enough to earn him that title. Holmes wrote:

If Drayton had fought at Agincourt, if Campbell had held a sabre at Hohenlinden, if Scott had been in the saddle with Marmion, if Tennyson had charged with the Six Hundred at Balaklava, each of these poets might possibly have pictured what he said as faithfully and as fearfully as Mr. Brownell has painted the sea-fights in which he took part as a combatant. But no man can tell a story at second hand with the truth of incident which belongs to an eye-witness who was part of what he saw.⁷

What Brownell saw may have been only small fragments of the war. But his poems, for Holmes, have an authority that transcends representation – they are indexical of the fighting. Brownell, he points out, “was actually penciling down” his poems “while the battle is going on around him,” a soldier and a reporter in one. Unlike the “second hand” war writing of Drayton, Scott, or Tennyson, Brownell’s “newspaper poems” are thus authentic battle pieces, almost literally pieces of the battle.

Melville, too, assumed that soldiers had access to the truth of war that others could not or should not claim. Garner mentions that “he deplored Tennyson’s ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ [as] a smooth-textured celebration of a pointless sacrifice of brave men written by a poet far removed in space.”⁸ *Battle-Pieces* responds to Tennyson’s facile patriotism by thematizing the disillusionment with heroic martyrdom that only a deadly bullet can bring. In “Shiloh. A Requiem” Melville imagines the “dying foemen mingled” on the battlefield, “fame or country least their care”; “(What like a bullet can undeceive!)” is the poem’s much quoted line. In “The College Colonel,” the titled officer survives battles, loss of limb, and incarceration, to finally gain enlightenment:

But all through the Seven Days’ Fight,
And deep in the Wilderness grim,
And in the field-hospital tent,
And Petersburg crater, and dim
Lean brooding in Libby, there came –
Ah heaven! – what *truth* to him.

Both poems open up an ironic gap as a depersonalized, omniscient speaker attempts to convey a truth about the war that, assumed to be the exclusive property of the wounded soldier, defies omniscience. In “The College Colonel” Melville momentarily narrows that gap when he likens the “half-tattered, and battered, and worn” regiment of the colonel to “castaway sailors” who “last crawl, spent, to shore,” thus evoking his

own set of experiences at sea as a potential frame of reference. But as the unspecified “truth” of the final line remains hanging in the air, the reader becomes conscious of the inadequacy of any frame of reference external to the suffering in the battles of the Seven Days or at Libby prison.⁹

As Susan Schweik has pointed out, such privileging of the soldier’s authority of experience based on his “exposure to violence, injury, and mechanized terror” is the hallmark of the modern war poem and will most fully be demonstrated in the trench poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon half a century after *Battle-Pieces*.¹⁰ But if the Civil War is a candidate for the first modern war – among others for its introduction of “mechanized terror” in warfare, to which Melville calls attention in such poems as “A Utilitarian View of the Monitor’s Fight” – then its textual effects can certainly be regarded as portents of modernity as well, not least for their insistence on the exclusive authority of the battle-worn soldier. No previous American episode has given rise to such a massive archive of personal narratives. In no previous conflict, moreover, have veterans taken over the project of writing the war’s story so commandingly. In the years after the Civil War, these veterans reminded readers again and again of the great gulf in knowledge separating combatants and civilians and often responded with resentment if any civilian writer dared challenge their accounts.¹¹ The configuration of the soldier-author addressing civilian-readers left little room for home-front writers to express their views.

The soldier’s superior authority was assumed to be ethical as well as epistemological. Access to the “truth” of battle meant license to raise questions about the war ideal, a license not extended to the uninitiated civilian. The discourse surrounding the status of citizens during the Civil War helps explain how the civilian writer’s ethical position was problematized. “Civilian,” meaning a “nonmilitary man or official,” only entered common parlance in the nineteenth century. The first modern code of war to elaborate on the combatant/civilian distinction was General Orders 100 of 1863, an instruction signed by President Lincoln to dictate the proper conduct of soldiers in battle. Authored by political philosopher Francis Lieber, General Orders 100 sought to sharpen the combatant/civilian distinction against the background of a Civil War in which, as even its name implies, this distinction was questionable from the outset, because armed men regarded as legitimate combatants by the South were seen as seditious citizens by the North.¹² By the war’s final campaigns, moreover, the policy of “total war” (another modern aspect of that conflict) actively challenged the distinction by targeting, in Sherman’s words, “not only

fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people.”¹³ Melville’s dismay over the targeting of civilians in 1864 is recorded in “The Swamp Angel” in which the Union’s Parrott gun, personified as an escaped slave (the “coal-black Angel/With a thick Afric lip” is one of the rare allusions to African Americans in *Battle-Pieces*), wreaks vengeance on the South by terrorizing Charleston’s women and children, who “Live in a sleepless spell/That wiz-ens, and withers, and whitens; It ages the young, and the bloom/Of the Maidens is ashes of roses.” In “The March to Sea,” Melville begins by celebrating Sherman’s triumphal Savannah campaign but ends up condemning what it left in its wake: “a wailing,/A terror and a ban,/And blazing cinders sailing/And houseless households wan.”¹⁴

But Melville was interested in the Northern civilians as well. In “Rebel Color-Bearers at Shiloh: A Plea against the Vindictive Cry Raised by Civilians Shortly after the Surrender at Appomattox,” he vilifies the citizen-patriots’ thirst for Confederate blood, so out of touch with the sentiments of the soldiers who spared the lives of Southern color-bearers at Shiloh. He thus raises the issue of the role of civilian sentiments in war, something with which Lieber was concerned as well. Where Melville critiqued overly zealous patriotism, however, Lieber targeted manifest disloyalty. He recognized that the standard criteria for distinguishing combatants from civilians – the wearing of uniform and the bearing of arms – were rendered insufficient in the present conflict, because danger often hid among unarmed, plain-dressed citizens. (John Singleton Mosby, for instance, was so hard to capture because he and his troops blended into the local farmers and townsmen.) Lieber thus added another category to the combatant/civilian distinction, that of the “manifestly disloyal” citizen, who may not be armed or uniformed but nevertheless poses danger to the nation. Disloyal citizens, he maintained, are identifiable not by appearance but by sentiments. As Helen M. Kinsella put it, Lieber prescribed that “an external sign (arms bearing) functions only insofar as the internal sentiment (loyalty) does not contradict . . . it is not the arms one bears but the sentiment one carries that truly distinguishes combatant from civilian.”¹⁵ In that context, the civilian’s expressed sentiments became measure of his or her loyalty and, hence, protection as civilian.

While it is the Southern guerilla fighter and his accomplices that Lieber mostly had in mind, this logic applied also to the citizens of the North. Northern war intellectuals, writes Kinsella, “deluged the public with speeches, sermons, letters, and manifestos describing the proper behavior for Union sympathizers.”¹⁶ Spoken and printed words were scrutinized

for any sign of treacherous sentiments. In 1862, the Loyal Publication Society, an arm of the republican-sponsored Union League clubs, defined loyal citizens as those who "support the contemplated draft, support emancipation, support the government's suspension of civil liberties, support the government against those who claimed to be neutral, and support the total conquest of the South."¹⁷ Dissenters risked censorship or even – as the much publicized case of antiwar Democrat Clement Vallandigham exemplified – incarceration and expulsion.¹⁸ In response to outrage over Vallandigham's military-court sentence, Lincoln wrote that "the man who stands by and says nothing when the peril of his government is discussed . . . is sure to help the enemy; much more if he talks ambiguously – talks for his country with 'buts,' and 'ifs,' and 'ands.'"¹⁹ If keeping silent could be a sign of disloyalty, then a better approach was equivocal speech.

One did not have to be a vocal copperhead like Vallandigham to face accusations of disloyalty. When in 1862 Nathaniel Hawthorne published in the *Atlantic Monthly* "Chiefly about War Matters," an essay expressing objections to the war and lampooning the Union leadership, he predicted that the magazine's largely Republican readership would find his writing treasonous. To preempt this response, he worked into the essay a series of footnotes purportedly inserted by the editor, which condemned in a self-righteously patriotic tone the sentiments expressed in the body of the essay. This split form of writing was Hawthorne's ingenious method of simultaneously voicing "disloyal" sentiments, protecting himself by self-censorship, and critiquing the ideological climate that demands that he do so. According to Garner, reading "Chiefly about War Matters" may have given Melville the initial idea that "serious writers . . . could make use of the war," and sometime soon after he began writing his war poetry.²⁰ If that is so, then Melville may have also learned from Hawthorne that a rhetorical apparatus is needed to navigate the difficult position of a civilian writer whose sentiments on the war are heterodox.

Several poems in *Battle-Pieces*, after all, fall under Lincoln's description of seditious speech as patriotism qualified "with 'buts,' and 'ifs,' and 'ands.'"²¹ They begin with conventional patriotic sentiments only to introduce a reversal in the concluding lines, typically with use of a conjunction. "Apathy and Enthusiasm," for example, celebrates the springtime rejuvenation of the people of the North following the "icy" stalemate of the months before the war: "the young were all elation/Hearing Sumter's cannon roar. . . And Michael seemed gigantical/The Arch-fiend

but a dwarf." In the final lines, however, youthful cheer transforms into gloomy prophecy of catastrophe:

But the elders with foreboding
Mourned the days forever o'er.
And recalled the forest proverb,
The Iroquois' old saw:
Grief to every graybeard
When young Indians lead the war.

In "The House Tops," the speaker adopts the party line about the New York draft riot of 1863, describing the riots as "Atheist roar" and the rioters as "rats" that overtake the town. The people "give thanks devout" to "wise Draco" come to restore order with militia guns. But the poem's ending undercuts any feeling of devotion. The speaker now meditates on "The grimy slur on the Republic's faith" implied by the government's counteracts of violence. In "Sheridan at Cedar Creek" Melville honors the general's courageous "ride" in the battle, a charge credited with bringing a crushing triumph to the union in October 1864. Once again, patriotic enthusiasm is reversed in the final stanza, with the speaker's wry observation that the sacrifices of common soldiers disappear in the shadow of Sheridan's mythic fame: "There is glory for the brave / Who lead, and nobly save, / But no knowledge in the grave / Where the nameless followers sleep." In other cases, the qualifying "but" occurs not within but between poems. Melville pairs poems to have the second throw the first into ironic relief. The patriotic "Lyon: Battle of Springfield Missouri," for example, sentimentalizes the Union general's brave self-sacrifice and rise "up to Zion, / Where prophets now and armies / greet brave Lyon." But it is followed by the antiwar "Ball's Bluff: A Reverie" in which the home-bound speaker observes from his window "a sight – saddest that eyes can see – / Young soldiers marching lustily / Unto the wars."²¹ Lyon's exemplary heroism is re-envisioned now as a deadly trap.²²

This structure of reversal reveals how "variable, and at times widely at variance" Melville's "moods" on the war were (as he avows in the preface to *Battle-Pieces*), a blend of patriotic and skeptical sentiments. In a sense, they had to be so. Melville's antebellum fiction, we have mentioned, contained a series of ethical positions – against human bondage, against military violence, and for the solidarity of common men, even as this solidarity crosses geographical and racial lines – that coexisted coherently in novels from *Typee* to *Moby Dick* and beyond. But the Civil War rendered these positions incompatible: one could no longer be antislavery

and antiwar, and a choice had to be made between “brothers,” as solidarity with the enslaved black could not be reconciled with solidarity with the white Southerner.²³ Melville’s equivocations can be read as symptoms of his struggle to continue to uphold pacifism, antislavery, and universal brotherhood in a context that made this seem untenable. This struggle is embedded, however, in other ones. If Melville’s poems, as Rosanna Warren has suggested, “labor for their knowledge, and engage the reader in that struggle,”²⁴ then they also labor to find a legitimate perspective from which to convey complex, contradictory sentiments about the war. These twin labors – epistemological and ethical – stem from the newly problematized position of the civilian writer.

Two features of *Battle-Pieces* frequently discussed by critics are the product of these labors: the poems’ elusive subjective center and their vacillation between totalizing and fragmented points of view. Both the question of who speaks and that of the speaker’s field of vision are implied as early as the title and preface of the collection. When used in reference to civilian poetry, “Battle-Pieces” connotes not the indexical writing of the soldier, but secondhand, reduced knowledge of the fighting. “Aspects of the War” is a phrase Melville likely borrowed from an anonymous 1863 poem about the citizens’ lack of access to war information: “Painfully the people wait/For the news by flying car/Eager for the battle’s fate,/And the aspect of the war.”²⁵ Aspects of the war are broken into battle pieces as they make their way North by train or telegraph. In the preface, Melville presents himself as the passive recipient of such haphazard shards of information:

With few exceptions, the Pieces in this volume originated in an impulse imparted by the fall of Richmond. They were composed without reference to collective arrangement, but being brought together in review, naturally fall into the order assumed. The events and incidents of the conflict – making up a whole, in varied amplitude, corresponding with the geographical area covered by the war – from these but a few themes have been taken, such as for any cause chanced to imprint themselves upon the mind. . . . Yielding instinctively, one after another, to feelings not inspired from any one source exclusively, and unmindful, without purposing to be, of consistency, I seem, in most of these verses, to have but placed a harp in a window, and noted the contrasted airs which wayward winds have played upon the strings.²⁶

Melville’s use of the passive voice almost completely obliterates the authorial first person. “Events and incidents” of the war, while constituting, in principle, a “whole,” are fractured into “themes” that have “chanced” to “imprint” themselves on his mind and then on the page. The reference

to romantic metaphors of creation does more to stress this passivity than to empower Melville by allusion to Coleridge and Shelley. It draws the reader's attention to the speaker's domestic setting, his removal from the battle fields. If Brownell, in Holmes's imagination, wrote even as he fought, Melville of the preface is ensconced indoors, awaiting the "wayward wilds" of battle to enter his home and imagination.

The diminishment of the "I" in this introductory apologia is carried into the poems themselves. Helen Vendler has identified what she calls the "inverted lyric" of *Battle-Pieces*: unlike the conventional lyrical poem that begins with the subjective perspective of the speaker and then zooms out to make abstractions, Melville commonly begins with abstractions and delays the introduction of the subjective perspective. For Vendler, this betokens Melville's ambition to fit the epic subject of war into the lyric form.²⁷ But the absent or deferred "I" may signal also the problem of civilian authorship. Given the lack of direct experience, the use of the first-person singular is reluctant – disguised, abstracted, or deferred. The fact that as many as a third of the poems are best read as dramatic monologues suggests this as well; by repeatedly ventriloquizing witnesses to the battles, Melville compensates for his own distance. An autobiographical "I" appears only rarely, and when it does, it is used self-consciously to defend a civilian perspective. In "Ball's Bluff," for example, this perspective is shown to enable an insight to which the recruits themselves are blind: "At my window in the town/I saw a sight – saddest that eyes can see – /Young soldiers marching lustily/Unto the wars."²⁸

The non-inverted lyric of "Ball's Bluff," moreover, is placed in contrast with the collective voice of the soldiers in the preceding "Lyon": "We spied the vale. . . . We fought on the grass, we bled in the corn."²⁹ Melville uses the soldierly "we" in several poems in *Battle-Pieces*. It is a familiar convention: this pronoun frequently functions in war literature to articulate the nation "as both actor and observer, annunciator and addressee."³⁰ The first-person plural serves to unite "the people" by subsuming the civilian-readers in the experience of the fighting band of brothers. This "we" is thus the mirror reflection of the justification for total war, the positive version of Sherman's "not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people": it blurs the distinction between civilians and combatants via identification, by encouraging the civilian reader to imagine him or herself a part of the fighting collective. That is how it functions in some of the more patriotic poems of *Battle-Pieces*. But just as Melville both concedes and challenges the limitations of the civilian "I," so does he both assert and critique the function of the nationalist "we." In "The Fall of

Richmond: The Tidings Received in the Northern Metropolis,” for example, he observes how the vindictive joy of Northern civilians over the burning of the Southern capital is channeled and justified through this form of identification: “Well that the faith we firmly kept,/And never our aim forswore, /For the Terrors that trooped from each recess/When fainting we fought in the wilderness.”³¹ Claiming the trials of the soldiers as its own, the now unified “heart of the People impassioned” celebrates that “Right through might” has prevailed.

Battle-Pieces’ unstable subjective center – a weak or absent civilian “I” that occasionally surfaces to voice critique; a strong nationalist, soldierly “we” whose manipulative use is occasionally exposed – is most extensively probed in one of the volume’s best known poems. “Donelson” reenacts in content and form the civilian/combatant divide as it recounts the four-day siege on the Tennessee fort from a split perspective: that of a Northern town, where “About the bulletin-board a band/Of eager, anxious people met”³² to await the latest news of the battle, and that of an anonymous newspaper correspondent (or several correspondents), whose reports from Donelson are typeset in italics.

Melville thus captures thematically as well as typographically (by alternating between fonts) the distance between witness-author and civilian-reader. As the battle becomes more chaotic and deadly, however, the voice of the reporter appears less authoritative. His initial optimism for a speedy triumph proves unwarranted, and the information he provides is occasionally confusing in its chronology. Perhaps inspired by Hawthorne, Melville includes the parenthetical comments of a newspaper editor, who intervenes to arrange the material in sequence. As in “Chiefly about War Matters,” these comments do more to expose the layered, mediated nature of war writing than to shed light on the events. The reporter’s own language, moreover, is marked by an excessive use of the nationalist first-person plural: “The bold inclosing line we wrought for ... But back we forced reserves and all; made good our hold: And so we rest ... We near the Den ... We stormed then on their left.” He even imagines the developing foul weather as a form of civilian participation in the battle: “the earnest North/ Has elementally issued forth/ To storm this Donelson.” But as the fighting takes a mounting toll in soldiers’ lives, the patriotic “we” splits apart. Experience of agony and death is exclusive to the combatants, and the reporter thus shifts to the third person: “But they who first / Gained the fort’s base, and marked the trees / Felled, heaped in horned perplexities. ... They faltered, drawing bated breath, / And felt it was in vain to dare. ... They came; / But left some comrades

in their fame, / Red on the ridge in icy wreath/ And hanging gardens of cold death.”³³

Nor does the civilian perspective remain unified. Unlike in “Richmond,” the townspeople in “Donelson” are not of one heart. The crowd gathering by the bulletin board includes a “cross patriot” upset over the victory’s delay and some young striplings who cheer General Grant with “shrill” voices. But it also includes a “lean Copperhead,” who voices antiwar criticism and is chased away with “a shower of broken ice and snow.” And there are “others,” who, overcome with worries over fighting relatives, retreat from the cheering crowd.³⁴ “Donelson,” as Russ Castronovo and Dana Nelson have pointed out, is partially about “what happens off the battlefield as citizens on the home front attempt – and often fail – to frame public discussions that would pose hard questions about the war.”³⁵ The poem’s panoramic scope, which bridges home front and battlefield through the mediation of the texts of war, fractures into different and even antagonistic positions. None of these positions, moreover, succeed in conveying the truth of the battle: not the blurry news bulletins, not the “shrill” civilian patriots, not the silenced dissenters or those who grieve in private. The missing voice is that of the combatants themselves, who may have seen that truth – like the dying soldiers in “Shiloh” or the wounded College Colonel – but whose story is one the omniscient narrator cannot tell.

Painting a broad but fractured scene, “Donelson” evokes what several critics have discussed as a central tension in *Battle-Pieces*: the discrepancy between the poems’ use of ideologically laden, totalizing modes, such as the epic or the pastoral, and what Peter Coviello has called their “formal eccentricities,” the rough, idiosyncratic style that troubles such modes. Some critics have argued that Melville’s broken prosody challenges the nationalistic ideology implied in totalizing poetic forms. Timothy Sweet and Hsuan Hsu, for example, each claim that Melville educes frames such as the panoramic picture or the pastoral only to resist, through counter-poetics, their naturalization and aesthetization of the war. Others, by contrast, have noted Melville’s success in transforming the chaotic, fragmented nature of war into a meaningful whole. Both Vendler and Cody Marrs, for example, understand Melville’s project to be the assimilation of the pieces of war into a larger, cyclical history of human aggression. Reading the poems through the civilian/combatant divide does not resolve this debate, but it does account for its persistence. Melville’s vacillation between totalizing and fragmented views and styles is on this account meaningful as it stands: a dynamic back and forth investigation

of the problem of the civilian author, whose distance allows a broad vision of the war even as it undermines that vision's access to truth and ethical viability.³⁶

Despite its publisher's vigorous promotion and despite high-quality printing and binding, *Battle-Pieces* failed to attract readers. Of its 1,200 copies, only 486 were sold by 1868 and a mere 39 more in the next eight years.³⁷ Nor did the volume fare well in reviews. From the lofty position of assistant editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, William Dean Howells wrote the best known one:

Is it possible – you ask yourself, after running over all these celebrative, inscriptive, and memorial verses – that there has really been a great war, with battles fought by men and bewailed by women? Or is it only that Mr. Melville's inner consciousness has been perturbed, and filled with the phantasms of enlistments, marches, fights in the air, parenthetical bulletin-boards, and tortured humanity shedding, not words and blood, but words alone?³⁸

What Howells discredits here, beyond *Battle-Pieces*, is secondhand war writing as such (much as Edmund Wilson will a century later). The future dean of American realism merges the civilian writer with the figure of the romancer, whose ethereal “phantasms” leave no room for real blood. Howellsian realism will contrast itself with romance by reaching for raw, immediate experience and then transforming that experience, through omniscient narration, into totalizing social panoramas. This is why Howells and other writers of his school (many of whom sat out the war or were born too late to participate in it) were both fascinated by the brutal realities of war and dodged writing about them for lack of direct experience. As John Limon explained, “realism [could] not avoid invoking the Civil War but only as the first occasion of its series of substitutions, the missing origin of its fetishistic metonymy.”³⁹ What Howells failed to notice about *Battle-Pieces* is its complex treatment of precisely those problems that would later plague his school of writing: distance from the real, the mediated nature of experience, and the ideological bias that hides behind panoramic omniscience. As a civilian war text, *Battle-Pieces* did not resist postbellum realism; it constituted one of its earliest examples.

Notes

- 1 Carolyn Karcher discusses the troubling absence of African Americans from *Battle-Pieces* in “The Moderate and the Radical: Melville and Child on the Civil War and Reconstruction,” *ESQ* 45.3&4 (1999), 187–257, and in “White

- Fratricide, Black Liberation Melville, Douglass, and Civil War Memory," *Frederick Douglass & Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, Robert S. Levine and Samuel Otter (eds.) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 349–368. On the pragmatism of Melville's reconciliatationist position, see Maurice S. Lee, "Melville, Douglass, the Civil War, Pragmatism," *Frederick Douglass & Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, pp. 396–415.
- 2 The phrase is Daniel Aaron's, who writes that although both Whitman and Melville looked at the war from the "concerned civilian" perspective, "Whitman breathed its fumes," whereas "Melville, more aloof, surveyed the conflict from his own lofty crow's nest . . . it probably never occurred to him to fight." See *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1973), p. 77.
 - 3 Martin Griffin, *Ashes of the Mind: War and Memory in Northern Literature, 1865–1900* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts press, 2009), p. 66.
 - 4 Quoted in Stanton B. Garner, *The Civil War World of Herman Melville* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), p. 313.
 - 5 In her analysis of the "culture of information" of the Civil War, Yael Sternhell shows that soldiers on the move were perceived as the most reliable source of information about the war, surpassing the reports of the newly professionalized war correspondents, despite the fact that the former's ability to understand their experience within a larger war picture was obviously limited. "Communicating War: The Culture of Information in Richmond During the American Civil War," *Past and Present* 202 (2009), 193–196.
 - 6 Quoted in Andrew Delbanco, *Melville: His World and Work* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 268.
 - 7 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Our Battle-Laureate," *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1865), 589.
 - 8 Garner, *Civil*, p. 43.
 - 9 Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1866), pp. 63, 121, 120.
 - 10 Susan Schweik, "Writing War Poetry like a Woman," *Critical Inquiry* 13.3 (1987), 532–553.
 - 11 Craig A. Warren, *Scars to Prove It: The Civil War Soldier and American Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009), Kindle file.
 - 12 Helen M. Kinsella, *The Image before the Weapon: A Critical History of the Distinction between Combatant and Civilian* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 82–86.
 - 13 William T. Sherman, Letter to Henry Halleck (24 Dec. 1864), *Civil War Era NC*, Web, 30 August, 2014.
 - 14 Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, pp. 108, 132.
 - 15 Kinsella, *Image*, p. 86.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 - 17 Garner, *Civil*, p. 221.
 - 18 As Mark E. Neely has shown in *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), Vallandigham's case

was notorious but not representative of the thousands of cases of suspension of habeas corpus during the war years, few of which involved free speech. There is no denying, however, the power this case held over public imagination in the North.

- 19 Quoted in Garner, *Civil*, p. 222.
- 20 Ibid., p. 154.
- 21 Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, pp. 20–21, 87, 117, 27, 28.
- 22 For many critics, the most important conjunction in *Battle-Pieces* is the unstated one between the poems and the prose supplement that Melville appended just before publication. Whether this conjunction is an “And, If or But,” however, remains a topic of debate. Some critics regard the supplement’s call for “common sense and Christian charity” in reconciling with the South, Melville’s choosing of “communities who stand nearer to us in nature” over “the blacks, in their infant pupilage to freedom” as a betrayal of the democratic ideas he had expressed in the poems. Others see the supplement, by contrast, as the fruition of the conciliatory message of the poems. In the context of the present argument, what is striking about the supplement is the authoritative tone that Melville adopts in it, so different from the equivocations that characterize the poetry. It is as if the process of composing the poems, and of struggling with questions of authority, finally earned him the confidence to speak his mind clearly about postwar politics.
- 23 Joyce Sparer Adler, “Melville and the Civil War,” *New Letters* 40 (1973), 99–117; Karcher, “Moderate”; Cynthia Wachtell, *War No More: The Antiwar Impulse in American Literature, 1861–1914* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2010).
- 24 Rosanna Warren, “Dark Knowledge: Melville’s Poems of the Civil War,” *Raritan* 19.1 (1999), 102.
- 25 Quoted in Garner, *Civil*, p. 215.
- 26 Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, n.p.
- 27 Helen Vendler, “Melville and the Lyric of History,” *Southern Review* 35.3 (1999), 579–594.
- 28 Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, p. 28.
- 29 Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, p. 25.
- 30 John Ellis quoted in Susan Schweik, “Writing War Poetry like a Woman,” *Critical Inquiry* 13.3 (1987), 539.
- 31 Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, p. 136.
- 32 Ibid., p. 33.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 35, 37, 38.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 39–40, 52.
- 35 Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, “Cross Patriotism in Melville and Douglass” in *Frederick Douglass & Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, p. 331.
- 36 Peter Coviello, “Battle Music: Melville and the Forms of War,” in *Melville and Aesthetics*, Samuel Otter and Geoffrey Sanborn (eds.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 196; Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990);

- Hsuan Hsu, "War, Ekphrasis, and Elliptical Form in Melville's *Battle-Pieces*," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 16 (2002), 51–71; Vendler, "Melville"; Cody Marrs, "The Wayward Art," *American Literature* 82.1 (2010), 91–119.
- 37 Lawrence Buell, "American Civil War Poetry and the Meaning of Literary Commodification: Whitman, Melville, and Others" in *Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution, and Consumption in America*, Steven Fink and Susan S. Williams (eds.) (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1999), p. 127.
- 38 William Dean Howells, "Reviews and Literary Notices," *Atlantic Monthly* (Feb. 1867), 252.
- 39 John Limon, *Writing After War: American War Fiction from Realism to Postmodernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 41.

Looking at Lincoln

Shirley Samuels

Words

To look at Abraham Lincoln is to discover a man so visible he can scarcely be seen. The paradox of that enhanced visibility might be increased by the way that his words are so familiar that we can scarcely hear him. To see Lincoln anew and to hear his words afresh becomes the challenge. This chapter considers how Lincoln appeared, stiff hair rising as a disheveled crown, top hat silhouetted above the crowd, when he was looked at by artists and writers. It also considers how Lincoln looked at himself, mocking his own appearance, and proposing at once rigorous and passionate systems of belief. To carry out attention to the visibility of Lincoln as a writer and politician, the chapter examines his orations as well as his written statements, listening to his words.

Abraham Lincoln first rose to regional prominence in rural Illinois as a lawyer whose commonsense rendering of convoluted land claims remains compelling reading. His ability to mock plaintiffs and defendants alike still emerges in the renderings of his speeches before the court. And yet the man who saw brief military service in the so-called Black Hawk War along the Mississippi River, the man who navigated rivers on a raft and saw slavery firsthand, scarcely appears to be the same man who produced the clipped eloquence of the Gettysburg Address.

How Lincoln wrote himself into existence retains a residue in the popular imagination in a register recorded from both oral and written performances. Contemporary anecdotes suggest that his speech could be coarse and even vulgar, while the classic texts with which he will be forever associated, such as the "Gettysburg Address" and the "Second Inaugural Address," seem to have survived because of the circulation of newspaper accounts. To see Lincoln as a writer is to see someone who draws on Biblical cadences as well as the bawdy tall tales humor of the so-called southwest – a region he traveled on the Mississippi around the same time

that Samuel Clemens was learning to pilot a steamboat. The words that remain show him to be both meticulous in his phrasing and certain that the lessons of history could produce a coherent strategy and an enduring set of beliefs. What persists, in the middle of such melancholy, urgent reasoning, and tall tale humor?

The relationships Lincoln had with both friends and enemies have received thorough attention, for example, in the influential way that Doris Kearns Goodwin set up his crafting of a “team of rivals.”¹ The matters of context and cultural expectations have led historians to pore over courtship letters, musing about the homoerotic implications of his bond with Joshua Speed. Produced through text, produced through image, Lincoln’s relations preoccupied his contemporaries as well as subsequent scholars. Visual and textual productions suggest a form of mythologizing that began long before it was suggested that he grow a beard, because newspaper distribution of the photograph made at Mathew Brady’s studio at the time of his Cooper Union address showed a gaunt clean-shaven face. That the subject cooperated with how his image might be used as a marketing tactic appeared early. If Lincoln is to be identified as a rail-splitter, for instance, so shall rails be part of the campaign.

What difference did it make to his words and to his political positions that Lincoln began his rise to prominence as a circuit rider? The difference in how he reads his audience may appear in how he stages his response in the debates with Stephen Douglas – telling the crowd to go eat first, for example, so they can listen more carefully to his rejoinders. Lincoln’s words then carried through to the vision for national reconciliation in the second inaugural address that is all the more unsettling and profound for being so thoroughly ravaged by his assassination. With the years that have passed, the aura around him has been burnished by movies and books. The commentary can be overwhelming. It has been estimated that on average a book a day has been published about him since he was assassinated.

Where does that leave slavery? As a name that could barely be spoken as part of political platforms, abolitionism preoccupied Lincoln even as its machinations obsessed political parties and popular culture alike. Hence the excruciating Currier and Ives political cartoon, depicting a political platform made of rails that appears to be built on and to hide slavery; it reminds viewers that the president used to engage in rail splitting as well as riffing on what it might be possible to imagine in a woodpile.² Abraham Lincoln with no jacket and rolled up sleeves, in the days before he had a beard, sits in discomfort as though riding a horse as he grasps the top rails

of a split rail edifice labeled "Republican Platform." Looking out from the rails, a man with a caricatured grin sits beneath him, echoing his posture. Lincoln says through tight lips: "Little did I think when I split these rails that they would be the means of elevating me to my present position." In a letter to Joshua Speed on slavery, Lincoln asserts: "I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down, and caught, and carried back to their stripes, and unrewarded toils; but I bite my tongue and keep quiet." He recalls to Speed a steamboat trip in 1841 when he traveled from Louisville to St. Louis, remembering that the sight of slaves "was a continual torment to me."³

These early articulations illuminate the language that led to Lincoln's later and more familiar rhetoric. The debates with Stephen Douglas, for example, contain repetitions that are worth the time it takes, as John Burt has recently shown.⁴ In these debates, the border territory that was about to be brought into statehood garners much attention because of the possible extension of legalized slavery. For Lincoln, what he calls the "Nebraska-law" was "conceived in violence, passed in violence, is maintained in violence, and is being executed in violence."⁵ Here, as elsewhere, the language of conception favors the organic images of birth in the discussion of law. The birth of new states becomes the place for violence.

During these famed debates with Stephen Douglas, Lincoln speaks in favor of the Missouri Compromise and against the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law as a safe, middle ground, Whig position, but he also folds support for the law into being both a man and an American. Shocking as we might find it today to know that Lincoln upheld the Fugitive Slave Law, it is also the case that, in the same address, he opposes slavery on moral grounds. He describes the embedded necessity of slavery as something that has been inherited, as something that is "hidden away in the constitution just as an inflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he may bleed to death."⁶ In spite of the fear of death, he promises that the cutting will begin eventually.

Lincoln's position has been understood as ambiguous; his addresses work to reconcile his passion for the law with his distaste for legalized slavery. In his politically subtle eulogy for Henry Clay, for example, Lincoln recognizes the lack of clarity in Clay's position as a slave owner who also presided over the American colonization society, the benighted effort to repatriate people perceived as stolen from Africa. Lincoln appears here as someone who recognized in himself the provocation of the position seen as most radical, "immediate emancipation." At that time, and possibly throughout his life, Lincoln did not express or recognize racial equality,

even as he promoted political equality. I propose neither to apologize nor to attempt to explain that statement; I merely acknowledge that Lincoln knew his audience. As an astute political thinker, Lincoln always returned to the holy claims of the law.

The emotions that the law aroused in Lincoln show up in his address to the young men's Lyceum in Springfield, Illinois, in 1838. As he often did, Lincoln referred to the American Revolution as a lodestone for political values. Noting that the revolution produced an ardor for political success, Lincoln warned presciently about the potential for a tyrant or a "genius" who would seek new grounds for ambition. This address contains an almost erotic sense of what ambition looks like. Passion for power, says Lincoln, can give rise to new despotism after the excitement and incentives of the American Revolution have worn off. As he puts it, "towering genius disdains a beaten path" as it "thirsts and burns" for power. He predicts that the nobility of the cause of the American Revolution produced a "state of feeling" that "*must fade, is fading, has faded.*"⁷

That Lincoln produced himself as a political subject through oral performance can be traced to his years riding a "circuit" as a lawyer who had to adapt to uncertain lodging and food in the small towns of western Illinois. In the debates with Stephen Douglas about the historical crises over slavery, Lincoln achieved an eloquence that paved the way to his presidential campaign, even as he lost the specific election to the Senate for which the debates were staged. The newspaper accounts are punctuated with responses from the crowd. Lincoln revised and remapped his positions as he spoke over those many months, and although these debates and the legal decisions to which they responded are still pored over by legal, cultural, and historical scholars, correlating written texts with the accounts in contemporary newspapers makes it possible to hear the roars and hisses of the crowd and to imagine the sight of mud on thrown vegetables.

The debates with Douglas might well be read as a prequel to the Emancipation Proclamation, a declaration that still stands as one of Lincoln's most powerful statements, even as its efficacy as a document providing freedom from slavery might have been limited. It seems difficult to reconstruct how present Lincoln was in the articulation of this legislation. That he had no speech writer might seem implausible, given the ubiquity of that role in today's presidency. But the repeated revisions that show up in the debates of the 1850s show how Lincoln took ideas and reworded them according to the responses of his audiences as he traveled the length and breadth of Illinois.

The state of Illinois was sandwiched between the western frontier of slavery and the northern routes to freedom. Lincoln's marriage might also seem to have been arranged across the dividing line between north and south. His family had migrated north from Kentucky, and he married a Kentucky woman whose slaveholding family was to fight for the Confederacy. The sexual and romantic rivalry that Lincoln engaged in with Stephen Douglas over Mary Todd, it seems incredible to repeat, echoed the political rivalry in which each led a crowd to a passionate position about land, slavery, and politics. And as poetic as that might now seem, there is also a brutality about it. What voice will control the woman? Which voice will control land? In the back and forth of the debates, a reader finds that the rivalry over the antislavery positions of the United States barely conceals this erotic tension.

Lincoln presents slavery throughout these debates as a negative blight on the landscape of the United States, but he presents the law, even the law upholding slavery, with a stronger reverence than the Bible. To have an education was also to have access to history, and to know history was to be able to inhabit the present in a vivid and compelling way. The most provocative instantiation of that historical sense appears in the Gettysburg Address, but it infuses entire speeches on a variety of topics, including the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The correlation of certain moments in the debates shows that some of the lines with which Lincoln has been most vividly associated changed as he practiced their effects on the crowd.

The most controversial moment in Lincoln's debates with Stephen Douglas about the Kansas-Nebraska Act that repealed the Missouri Compromise may have been his declaration that "because I do not want a black woman for a slave, I must want her for a wife." Instead, he famously declared, "I can just leave her alone."⁸ The speeches that lead up to that debate show Lincoln practicing his lines, returning to rephrase the concepts with which he has been so indelibly linked. A house divided cannot stand, he repeats. And, earlier, he follows the comment about the place of the "negro woman" with a comment more appropriate for a working man who once returned part of a fee saying that he had been overpaid. She has the right to work for wages. The right to a fair wage has become a remote point in the attention to Lincoln imagining a "wife," a position that has been laid at his door by scurrilous attacks.

Most historians report simply that, on 18 September 1858, Lincoln declared that "I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife." On that occasion Lincoln goes on to say that his "understanding is that I can just let

her alone." When he made the comment earlier, in a speech delivered on 26 June 1857 on the Dred Scott decision, in Springfield, Illinois, he was also replying to Stephen Douglas, but Douglas was not in the audience. On this prior occasion, Lincoln stressed that he replies to a "counterfeit logic" and asserts that "in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands without asking leave of anyone else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others."⁹

In thinking about slavery as the issue that preoccupied political discourse in the years leading up to the Civil War, it matters to remember how political issues surrounding slavery were woven into debates about the expanding geopolitical borders of the country. There were vicious attacks within the Senate during the Missouri Compromise legislation (1821), the Fugitive Slave Law (1850), and the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), but starting with the constitutional convention there had been a great deal of violence within debates about what property mattered in the north and the south. Even as slavery dominated some counting of resources within the exchanges between north and south, the violence of debate about resources also focused on how goods and people could be moved to markets. These debates included attention to what forms the transportation revolution might take (from canals to steamships to railroads). In thinking about the battles of the Civil War, it can be possible, for example, to overlook the acts of legislation that involve the transcontinental railroad. The violence of the war itself often occurred in the west: for instance, the hanging of Indians in Minnesota and the border warfare in Kansas and Missouri. To consider the conflict as one between the north and the south invokes an incoherent landscape that we now think of as belonging to one country. The actions of Andrew Jackson, starting west from Florida, the provocations of Benjamin Butler in New Orleans, the early rise of Ulysses S. Grant along the Mississippi River, took place on lands then understood to be western. That Lincoln appeared as a candidate from the west made his geographic appeal more profound.

Crucially, within a network of exchange that made military advances during the Civil War, the transportation revolution also included forms of communication such as telegraph wires. The relation between the movement of words along the straight line of the telegraph and the straight line of the railroad, whose beds the telegraphs poles followed, formed a key part of the industrial revolution. Drawing on the ideological challenges to national boundaries that had been affected by the revolutions in Europe in 1848, as well as the fervent patriotism that accompanied the boundary crossing of the Mexican-American War, both Union soldiers

and Confederate soldiers understood themselves to be part of either a past revolution or a revolution in progress. What preoccupied readers at the time could vary. The terrible violence that took place between pro- and antislavery factions in Lawrence, Kansas sometimes faded in the light of the migrations provoked by the Gold Rush in California, even as the feminist precepts of the 1848 Seneca Falls convention can vanish in light of the legislation about slavery that followed so quickly afterwards, and, of course, with the outbreak of war. The shifts in political focus that such events produced need to be read as background for Lincoln's position as well as for the cultural contexts into which war intruded.

There remain jarring discontinuities between assumptions that the war was (1) over slavery, (2) fought by men on well-defined battlefields, (3) between North and South. Such assumptions leave out nationalism, border skirmishes, and the battle over the west. These are the positions in which Lincoln stakes his own ground. The contractual thinking that dominated the war was particularly invested in the question of what it meant to be part of a nation, sometimes formulated as a conflict between states' rights and national dominion. In historical terms, the conflict between the rights of states and the federal government can be traced, as Lincoln so often did, to the American Revolution. During the Civil War, the rhetoric of the American Revolution served to justify rebellion for and in the South. The great challenge to understanding nationalism through the identification of geographical boundaries is that such assertions claim to contain a particular form of belief in a kind of unified field theory of both state and nation.

Images

The standard account of the Civil War is that there's not an "art" of the Civil War. The literary critic Daniel Aaron called it "the unwritten war," and we might also call it "the unseen war" in spite of the simultaneous development of photography that made it one of the first wars to be viewed through photojournalism. Changes in the popularity and form of newspapers reflected changes in lithography and the way that images from the battlefield were reproduced for readers even as the proliferation of photographs showed a move from daguerreotyping to the wet plate process. Newly popular magazines such as *Harper's* and the *Atlantic Monthly* contained literature as well as editorials on the volatile breakdowns in the abolitionist movement that accompanied the transition from the American Colonization Society to the more radical abolitionists such as John Brown.

Throughout these transitions, the face of Abraham Lincoln was disseminated as that of no other president except George Washington.¹⁰ In the years since, the image of Abraham Lincoln has become inextricably tied to his profile on currency and to the statue that anchors one end of the national mall in Washington, DC. That statue has come to stand in for the presidency and even to embody the United States. In front of this statue, for instance, Barack Obama staged his political arrival as president. During the nineteenth century, Lincoln's visibility in the newspapers included political cartoons, engravings in newspapers, statues, and paintings, such as the one by Roy Carpenter who spent six months at the White House to paint a portrait of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Before Daniel Chester French took on the monumental task of sculpting a visible Lincoln for the national mall in Washington, DC, there were several sculptors in the nineteenth century who competed for the privilege of sculpting him. Among them were Vinnie Ream, whose position as a young attractive woman made her work as a sculptor of Lincoln highly controversial, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens, who made the memorial to Robert Gould Shaw that stands in the Boston Common. When describing how he sculpted Lincoln, Saint-Gaudens recalled seeing Lincoln for the first time in 1860 – "Lincoln stood tall in the carriage, his dark uncovered head bent in contemplative acknowledgement of the waiting people."¹¹ The residue of this first glimpse lingers in the quiet contemplation of his *Standing Lincoln*.

How did the face and body of Abraham Lincoln come to stand for the country? The country had previously been identified with an iconic woman referred to as Columbia. The substitution of the male body of the president for the body of Columbia takes place, I argue, because of this resonant crossing of iconographic vulnerability and historical visual presence. Such substitutions might stand (in) for a need to substitute in racial terms, a substitution also carried out in ways that the concept of the captive carries over from African American slavery to frontier violence. The shift from Columbia to Lincoln might be understood as accompanying a move from previous images of the nation as a woman to the nation imaged as a tall brooding man. The sexuality that inevitably attaches to white marble women fades away and could never reach Lincoln's inviting gaze in Daniel Chester French's rendition in the Lincoln Memorial.

To consider that the visual presence of Lincoln has become folded into iconic portrayals obscures the competitions that artists entered into over how he would be portrayed. The relation between high and low culture

appears in tense standoffs in these imaginings of Lincoln's face even as the impact of photography comes to dominate the visual field. As photographed, his face has become so familiar that even the statues have to refer to it.

The emphasis on the visual aspect of Lincoln that I want to bring into relation with his writing includes a look at the "Gettysburg Address." In particular, I want to consider not only the way that the words on that occasion concern birth and death but also the way that they invoke photography. First, birth. We all know the words. This nation was "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." I want to add to these familiar words a perhaps unfamiliar question, drawing on my background as a feminist scholar of cultural norms: What kind of conception was this? Who conceived? Conception suggests that there might have been a woman somewhere giving birth to the nation whose birth is heralded in the address. Perhaps she is Liberty.

The process that led to the mention of conception in this address – the process that brought Lincoln on the train to Gettysburg immersed in the thoughts that became his short presentation in front of living mourners – emerges from death. To remember the blood that had been spilled on the ground before the crowd is to present the ache of losing those who were loved, but these deaths also present a loss of future possibilities for conception.

The second stressed term in the Address is death: "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate this ground." The ground holds bodies. Sometimes these bodies were looted to retrieve photographic images of the family members left behind, and sometimes these images were the only way that the body's identity could be traced. So, third, I want to consider the unmentioned business of identification through photography. Photography became a significant aspect of that battlefield, as with the story of the man whose photograph of three children was found on his body as he lay unremarked on the field of death. Because newspapers could not then reproduce photographs, it was an engraving of the children that was disseminated; through the image of his children they discovered his identity.

What links these topics is the matter of how both bodies and images could be reproduced. Some report that the audience at Gettysburg could barely hear the remarks Lincoln made. The dissemination and effect of the address had everything to do with its reproduction in newspapers – newspapers that were consumed at home and that brought the war home through texts and images. The war at home had already happened in the

town of Gettysburg: the town was occupied and then strewn with corpses. The townspeople were angry that they were commandeered to bury bodies. The smell of rotting bodies filled the streets.

Neither causality nor temporality can be presented in an even-handed or immaculate way. For example, the operations of Protestant Christianity with respect to concepts of the state surely informs the extent to which Abraham Lincoln's death on Good Friday influenced the sense of him as a transcendent president. To return to the impact of statues such as the *Standing Lincoln* is to ask: What is being remembered? Who is being mourned? When you look at these objects now, whether you know it or not, you are also looking at the emotional responses of all the viewers who have come before you.

The "Gettysburg Address" asks its audience to think about what nation can be conceived in liberty. When the birth is announced in a site of death, what kind of consecration can be called down? This nation, said Lincoln, shall not perish from the earth. When the earth is saturated with the blood of those who have perished, the concept that you can find a principle "of the people, by the people, for the people" necessarily involves both life and death. As he gave the address, Lincoln stood in the land of the dead. Bodies that lay on Cemetery Ridge, on Little Round Top, and in the Peach Orchard had just been buried. Bodies had been dug out of rocky soil to be posed for the photographers. Alexander Gardner and the other members of Mathew Brady's photographic studio dragged a rifle around as a prop to place beside fallen bodies for the collection later published as *The Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War*. Two key images from that collection show corpses on the field of battle from two different angles. Gardner writes about the bodies as though they fought on opposite sides.¹²

But which bodies are Union soldiers and which are Confederates? The photographer shifts ground and trains his lens on the same bodies from a different direction and calls them enemies of each other when they are instead the same bodies. That may be the point. In the Civil War cemetery in Elmira, New York, for instance, bodies are separated so that some look north and some look south. We do not know, by looking at the bodies, what side they were on. Such an obsession with images also appears in the recent discovery that there is a silhouette within a crowd photograph that has reliably been identified as the outline of Lincoln's head. Why do we care to see this visual evidence? What does it matter that the outline of Lincoln's hat appears in the horizontal line of heads bobbing around in Gettysburg?

To stop and remember these elements of language, place, and history forms part of the story of Abraham Lincoln. To tell this story of the Civil War – a story that merges loss, longing, and the formulations of history – the first president of Cornell, Andrew Dickson White, kept a scrapbook of newspaper clippings from the battles, now in the university archives. I began by asking a question that for me was fairly obvious: In the birth of freedom, where were the mothers? I would like to ask further, what made this a constituent moment, to adapt a phrase from my colleague Jason Frank?¹³ The clarity with which Lincoln produced a sense of rightness for the occasions that drew crowds of people who were mourning or uncertain about the future includes phrases that have been repeated for 150 years. Looking at the relation of bodies to land, as these bodies were then lying so recently buried, I also want to ask about how, through the pain of childbirth, does one bring forth a nation?

Poetry

As we reimagine the figure whose monumentality perversely makes him hard to see, we must go back and read the words. Lincoln appears throughout his life as a man who loved poetry. His attachment to poetic renderings was strong enough that he sent three versions of the same poem about his return to his childhood home to correspondents. In the three versions that he sent out, he first includes a long middle section about a case of madness in his hometown, then cuts the section to make the poem more nostalgic, then includes it again. The insertion, retraction, and reinsertion make it all the more powerful as a jarring presence in the place that he wants to call home. The madness of the figure that he includes in the poem includes an attempt on the life of his mother. Lincoln's explanation does not seem to clarify the need to tell the story as part of a story about home.

To end with a section on poetry is to encourage a memory of Lincoln as someone attached to poetry as well as to remember that Walt Whitman was inspired to write some of the greatest poems of mourning by the assassination of Lincoln.¹⁴ As early as 1838, Lincoln was eloquent about lynch mobs and the terrible violence in Mississippi. He commented on the destruction of printing presses. A poetry appears in his horror about mob violence; he says that dead men hanging from trees have formed a "drapery of the forest." At the same time, he names a man dragged from the streets of St. Louis, chained to a tree, and burned to death. Yes, says Lincoln, the man might have been sentenced to death if the mob had

waited for the courts to try him for the murder of which he had been accused, but the “mobocratic spirit” makes it just as likely that innocent people will be killed. That possibility destroys the “attachment of the people” to the law and that is the end of democratic government. Lincoln is prepared to pledge “life, liberty” to protect the government.¹⁵

The allusion to epic poetry reminds us of the proclaimed investment in the story of the United States as an emergent nation that should be told in an epic form, a charge often made to poets in the early American republic. Interestingly, perhaps, the multitudinous narratives of the Civil War did not produce a call for it to be told as an epic poem. Rather, in works like “Battle Pieces” and “Drum Taps,” writers like Herman Melville and Walt Whitman found themselves bound up with brevity. They produced lyrics whose strength may appear in the very formal limitations of short lines.

Those poets and novelists who took on the Civil War often referenced Lincoln at the background of the events they depicted. Only Whitman seems to have more or less obsessively identified Lincoln as the tragic figure in the middle of events – for Whitman, Lincoln stood in for death even before his assassination. The deaths that Whitman witnessed in the field hospitals in Washington, DC, were punctuated by the sights of Lincoln in his carriage riding out to the Soldier’s Home. For Whitman, the natural landscape, the flora and fauna of the United States, evoke the man who had emerged from the natural landscape. Like “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” the poem “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” echoes the song of a bird commemorating death. The residue of the assassination inspired many mourning poems in Walt Whitman. For example, in “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” Whitman remembers April as the time for lilacs but also the loss of “him who I loved.” This memory, this synesthetic version of a sight evoked by a smell, remains. Whitman evokes the hagiography that followed an assassination on Good Friday and the general sense of erasure attending the elision of Lincoln’s flaws as he became identified with Christ.¹⁶

But for writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, the politics of antislavery agitation were distasteful and the sight of the uncouth prairie president most distressing. When he traveled to Washington, DC, to view the president, in the original version of his “Chiefly about War Matters,” Hawthorne calls him “Uncle Abe” and excoriates the oddity of his physical presence. Called to task by his publisher, Hawthorne retorts that to take out his familiarity is to lose something “very nice.”¹⁷

For Frederick Douglass, remembering Lincoln after his assassination is to remember him as a “white man.” When Douglas spoke to

commemorate Lincoln at the dedication of the Emancipation Monument on 14 April 1876, he asserted that Lincoln “was preeminently the white man’s President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country.” As a corrective to the view of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator, Douglas remembers that Lincoln “was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master.” Much as it might be appropriate for white people to “sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his statues, to hang his pictures high upon your walls, and commend his example,” it is nonetheless true, says Douglas, that Lincoln “delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose.”¹⁸

As he goes on to eulogize him, however, Douglas turns to poetry. Remembering that Lincoln came from a background of hard labor, he continues, quoting from Thomas Hood’s “The Lay of the Laborer”:

A spade, a rake, a hoe,
A pick-axe, or a bill;
A hook to reap, a scythe to mow,
A flail, or what you will¹⁹

Not the black man’s president, Lincoln was a man of his time, and Douglas is astute in his memory of Lincoln as a white man who enacted the double task of ending slavery and preserving the union. Like Douglas’s most famous address “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” this eulogy contains some bitterness as well as thoughtful appreciation.

In contrast, the woman who made dresses for the White House, Elizabeth Keckley, remembered Lincoln with great fondness even as she excoriated the reactions of Mary Todd Lincoln. For Keckley, the “Moses of my people had fallen in his hour of triumph.” Her memory of the speech Lincoln gave at the conclusion of the war also seems highly poetic: “The swaying motion of the crowd, in the dim uncertain light, was like the rising and falling of billows – like the ebb and flow of the tide upon the stranded shore of the ocean.” The sound from the crowd was “like the subdued sullen roar of an ocean storm, or the wind sighing through the dark lonely forest.” Lincoln, like a Byronic hero, stands in the window of the white house with “pale face and his soul flashing through his eyes.”²⁰

To conclude by remembering Lincoln in relation to poetry is to remember Lincoln’s voice in relation to the images this language produced. The

man whose repeated references to the Declaration of Independence evoke “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor” voiced words that continue to resonate, continue to evoke, continue to echo. After 150 years, we continue to watch and to listen.

Notes

- 1 Doris K. Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).
- 2 See the cartoon, attributed to Louis Maurer, here: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/pgs.04954/>. Another source is in Bernard F. Reilly (ed.), *American Political Prints, 1766–1876* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991), entry 1860–30. See also <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003674571/>. Both Web sources accessed 28 May 2015.
- 3 Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859–1865: Speeches, Letters, and Miscellaneous Writings, Presidential Messages and Proclamations*, Don E. Fehrenbacher and Roy P. Basler (eds.) (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1989), p. 360.
- 4 John Burt, *Lincoln's Tragic Pragmatism: Lincoln, Douglas, and Moral Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).
- 5 Lincoln, *Speeches*, p. 361.
- 6 Ibid., p. 338.
- 7 Ibid., p. 35.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 398, 636.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 636, 637, 398.
- 10 The question might be asked about how popular attention to Lincoln emerges from the fascination with Washington as the “father of his country.” Not (quite) a son, Lincoln repeatedly refers to fathers. His own father was a problematic figure; Lincoln refused to travel to see him when he lay dying.
- 11 Quoted in John H. Dryfhout, *The Work of Augustus Saint-Gaudens* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2008), p. 158.
- 12 Alexander Gardner, *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* (New York: Dover, 1959).
- 13 Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
- 14 Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1982).
- 15 Lincoln, *Speeches*, pp. 29, 31, 32.
- 16 Whitman, *Complete*.
- 17 Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Chiefly about War Matters,” *Atlantic Monthly* 10.57 (1862), 43–62. The Web site for *The Atlantic* comments on the disputed items in Hawthorne's essay in italics. Cf. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/02/chiefly-about-war-matters-by-a-peaceable-man/308816/>. Accessed May 28, 2015. Letter to James T. Fields dated 23 May 1862, Fields Collection, Huntington Library (FI 2287).

- 18 Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor (eds.) (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), p. 620.
- 19 Ibid., p. 622.
- 20 Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*, 1868 (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 140, 130.

Frederick Douglass, Violence, and Abraham Lincoln

Robert S. Levine

The Frederick Douglass that we know from his most famous work – the canonical *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) – is not the Douglass of the Civil War. In his first autobiography, written at a time when he was aligned with the moral-suasionist William Lloyd Garrison, and in his many speeches of the period, Douglass took pains to emphasize the value of nonviolent responses to slavery. Douglass even presented the occasion of his successful resistance to the slave breaker Edward Covey as a self-defensive parrying in which he refused to inflict injury. But beginning in the late 1840s Douglass began to have second thoughts about nonviolence, and by 1851, following his formal break with Garrison, he was regularly asserting that the violence of slavery demanded a violent response. After a fugitive slave hunter was killed in Boston in 1854 when he attempted to remand Anthony Burns into slavery, Douglass remarked: “his slaughter was as innocent, in the sight of God, as would be the slaughter of a ravenous wolf in the act of throttling an infant.” Douglass declared in his 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom* that if the slave “kills his master, he imitates only the heroes of the revolution,” and that same year he offered his support for antislavery fighters in the Kansas-Nebraska territories, such as John Brown and his sons. Although Douglass decided not to join what he regarded as Brown’s suicidal effort to take the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, he boldly endorsed the sort of terroristic violence that Brown had been deploying during the mid-to-late 1850s. As he proclaimed in a speech of 1860 delivered several months after Brown’s execution: “we must . . . reach the slaveholder’s conscience through his fear of personal danger. We must make him feel that there is death in the air about him, that there is death in the pot before him, that there is death all around him.”¹

Douglass’s immediate response to the attack on Fort Sumter was to embrace the Civil War as a war of emancipation that would require death way beyond the scale of what Brown had imagined at Harpers Ferry.² He

hoped and expected that President Abraham Lincoln would share his view that the war was not just about preserving the Union but also about emancipating the slaves. In *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, first published in 1881 and then revised and expanded for its final 1892 publication, Douglass portrays Lincoln as committed precisely to those goals. Thus he writes about how he campaigned for Lincoln and helped elect “a man who in the order of events was destined to do a greater service to his country and to mankind than any man who had gone before him in the presidential office.” Although he asserts that Lincoln understood right from the start that the Civil War offered “the opportunity to destroy slavery,” he concedes that there were moments when his faith in Lincoln was “shaken,” such as in late 1862, “when even Mr. Lincoln could tell the poor Negro that ‘he was the cause of the war.’”³ But overall Douglass presents Lincoln in *Life and Times* as a man who understood that the bloodletting of war was needed to bring about the end of slavery.

Douglass’s account in *Life and Times* of his interactions with Lincoln has helped generate a significant critical literature on how the great black reformer and the president worked together to preserve the Union and abolish slavery.⁴ But these biographical studies over-rely on a retrospective autobiography that needs to be read with some skepticism. Douglass wrote the 1881 *Life and Times* at the historical moment when Lincoln had become apotheosized in American culture and when Douglass himself had become a controversial figure in the Republican Party, attacked for his oversight of the Freedman’s Bank and for his criticism of the Southern blacks – known as Exodusters – who chose to move North. So Douglass used the autobiography to link his star with Lincoln’s, portraying himself as a patriotic U.S. nationalist who from the moment of the attack on Fort Sumter had every confidence that Lincoln shared his vision of the emancipatory promise of the war. What Douglass chose not to discuss in his 1881 autobiography were the many doubts and criticisms he had expressed about Lincoln in the first few years of his presidency. In 1861, Douglass embraced a war whose very violence seemed to him the best possible way to break the South’s stranglehold on the government. Thus one of Douglass’s great heroes into the 1860s, and beyond, was “that noble old John Brown” (as Douglass referred to him in 1863), the man who modeled for the antislavery movement the value of violent opposition.⁵ By contrast, much of what Douglass wrote about Lincoln during the Civil War was highly critical of the president as a temporizer and appeaser; it was not until after Lincoln’s assassination that Douglass came to celebrate what Walt Whitman called “the first great Martyr Chief.”⁶ At least until the

time of the second inauguration, Douglass was one of Lincoln's harshest critics, in large part because of his frustrations with Lincoln's reluctance to use the full force of the military against the slaveholding South.

Douglass's frustrations were on clear display in the pages of his newspaper, *Douglass' Monthly*. In response to Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, delivered shortly after southern secession, Douglass wrote that the president "announc[ed] his complete loyalty to slavery in the slave States. . . . prostrating himself before the foul and withering curse of slavery." Later that year Douglass remarked that "unless a new turn is given to the conflict . . . we might as well remove Mr. LINCOLN out of the President's chair, and respectfully invite JEFFERSON DAVIS or some other slaveholding rebel to take his place." Douglass declared in 1862 that "[t]he President of the United States seems to possess an ever increasing passion for making himself appear silly and ridiculous," and that his politics have "been calculated . . . to shield and protect slavery from the very blows which its horrible crimes have loudly and persistently invited." Instead of appeasing the border states and developing plans, as Lincoln advocated in 1862, for colonizing blacks to the southern Americas, Douglass argued that the very blacks Lincoln wished to remove from the country should be deployed as soldiers in the Union army. "War was made to hurt, and those who provoke it ought to be hurt," Douglass wrote in 1861. Convinced that the Union army could hurt the South most effectively with the help of black soldiers, Douglass, in an 1862 newspaper article, suggested that Lincoln's unwillingness to allow blacks to participate in the Union army was just one more instance of the temporizing and appeasement that was unnecessarily extending the war. The Union army is "striking the guilty rebels with . . . [a] soft white hand," Douglass lamented, "when we should be striking with the iron hand of the black man."⁷

Douglass's editorials and speeches of 1861 and 1862 reveal that his faith in Lincoln was much more tentative than he conveys in *Life and Times*. Did his vision of Lincoln change in 1863, the year of the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's introduction of black troops into the Union army? Did his first meeting with Lincoln later that year inaugurate a friendship? Recent historians have suggested that these two great leaders forged a friendship that had significant consequences for the ways they approached the war. James Oakes, for instance, sees Douglass becoming more pragmatically political and Lincoln more radical as a result of their meetings.⁸ But the fact is that over the course of the Civil War, Douglass met with Lincoln just three times, twice privately, for a total of probably around sixty minutes.

As short as they were, those meetings have become central to what I regard as the mythologization of the Douglass-Lincoln friendship, the belief that these two men worked together to bring the war toward its favorable outcome in preserving the Union and ending slavery. As I have suggested, this is a myth created in large part by Douglass years after the end of the Civil War. Douglass is such a rhetorically persuasive writer that his accounts of his meetings and exchanges with Lincoln have generally been accepted as reliable. (Lincoln never wrote about Douglass, so we do not have contravening accounts.) But there is evidence that these meetings, which focused on the issue of violence, did not go exactly as Douglass described.

In the 1881 *Life and Times*, Douglass offers a dramatic account of his first meeting with Lincoln on 10 August 1863, when he came to the White House to demand equal pay for the black troops as well as a retaliation policy that would discourage the Confederate army's practice of executing black prisoners. Douglass was particularly invested in these issues because he had campaigned since the outset of the war for the use of black troops in the Union army. He became a recruiting agent early in 1863 for the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, and in his memorable broadside, "Men of Color, To Arms!," he called for black volunteers who would fight in the heroic tradition of Nathaniel Turner. Additionally, Douglass's sons Charles and Lewis had enlisted in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, and so his interest in equal pay for blacks and his worries about black vulnerability spoke to concerns about his sons as well. In his 1881 account, Douglass describes a highly productive meeting with the president. He recalls that "[l]ong lines of care were already deeply written on Mr. Lincoln's brow, and his strong face, full of earnestness. . . . I at once felt myself in the presence of an honest man – one whom I could love, honor, and trust without reserve or doubt." In this retrospective account, Douglass is reverential, looking up to the care-worn president, who, despite being his superior, "listened with patience and silence to all I had to say." After mulling over Douglass's arguments about equal pay and retaliation, Lincoln states that he has to move slowly on these issues because of popular prejudices against blacks, but that the pay for black and white soldiers will one day be equal. As for retaliation, in the 1881 account Lincoln says that killing Southern soldiers in an eye-for-eye way would be "a terrible remedy" that could lead to the death of innocent people. Douglass's response is to display a surprising sympathy for Lincoln's position: "In all this I saw the tender heart of the man rather than the stern warrior and commander-in-chief of the American army and navy, and, while I could not agree with him, I could but respect his humane spirit." The meeting ends with Lincoln

promising that “he would sign any commission to colored soldiers whom his Secretary of War [Edwin M. Stanton] should commend to him,” and with Stanton himself saying that a military commission for Douglass was in the works.⁹ In this 1881 account, Lincoln comes off as a great man, as no racist, and, as befitting the 1881 context of reunion and reconciliation, as deeply concerned about North and South alike.

But should we trust this account? It is worth noting that during the same month that Douglass met with the Lincoln he presents so reverentially in 1881, he had some unsparing words for the president in his newspaper. Responding in the August 1863 *Douglass' Monthly* to the murder of scores of blacks during the July 1863 New York City draft riots, Douglass accused Lincoln of “indifference and contempt for the lives of colored men” in his apparent unwillingness to protect blacks from violence.¹⁰ Using the draft riots to make his case, he called on Lincoln to adopt a policy of retaliation for any black soldier killed in cold blood by Confederate troops. Interestingly, by the time of their meeting later in the month, Lincoln had issued an Order of Retaliation, and according to a letter that Douglass wrote privately to his friend George L. Stearns two days after he met with Lincoln, he thanked Lincoln in person for issuing that order.¹¹ But in his public writings he presented Lincoln as reluctant to sign a retaliation order into law – in 1881 because he wanted to present Lincoln as a national leader who refused to be vindictive toward the South, and in 1863 because he remained convinced that Lincoln did not care about blacks in light of his failure to comment on the draft riots.

Writing in 1863 as a critic of Lincoln, Douglass presented himself as much less deferential to Lincoln in their August 1863 meeting. We see this, for example, in a reporter's account of Douglass's speech of 4 December 1863 to the American Anti-Slavery Society. Douglass says about his meeting with Lincoln (and the reporter includes the crowd's response):

Let me tell you how I got to him; because every body can't get to him. . . . I expect[ed] to have to wait at least half a day; . . . but in two minutes after I sent in my card, the messenger came out, and respectfully invited “Mr. Douglass” in. I could hear, in the eager multitude outside, as they saw me pressing and elbowing my way through, the remark, “Yes, damn it, I knew they would let the nigger through,” in a kind of despairing voice – a Peace Democrat, I suppose. (Laughter.) When I went in, the President was sitting in his usual position, I was told, with his feet in different parts of the room, taking it easy. (Laughter.) . . . As I came in and approached him, the President began to rise, and he continued to rise until he stood over me (laughter); and he reached out his hand and said, “Mr. Douglass, I know

you; I have read about you, and Mr. Seward has told me about you;" putting me quite at ease at once.

Douglass subsequently describes himself as doing most of the talking, and overall he has good things to say about what he terms "Honest Abraham." Nevertheless, he reports that he tells Lincoln directly that "he had been somewhat slow in proclaiming equal protection to our colored soldiers and prisoners," and he remarks on Lincoln's own self-criticism that he has been "vacillating" with respect to deploying black troops and protecting vulnerable blacks. Most important, unlike in *Life and Times*, Douglass gives Lincoln relatively little credit for pursuing emancipation and abolition, despite the Emancipation Proclamation (which failed to free the slaves of the border states). As Douglass asserts to the antislavery group: "But we are not to be saved by the captain this time, but by the crew. We are not to be saved by Abraham Lincoln, but by that power behind the throne, greater than the throne itself." And then he praises "dear old John Brown" for the assault on Harpers Ferry that was about "making every slave free, and every free man a voter. (Great applause.)"¹² One thing that Douglass does not mention in this speech is the promise of a military commission, which he knew had fallen through. Perhaps he wanted to save himself from embarrassment, although I suspect that he continued to harbor the hope for a commission into early 1865.

Although Douglass was mostly pleased with this first meeting, he continued to criticize Lincoln in late 1863 and early-to-mid 1864, fearful that the president was looking for a negotiated peace. Thus he considered supporting John C. Frémont for the presidency. Moreover, several months before his second meeting with Lincoln, Douglass gave a speech in which he asserted that the war had still not become an antislavery war, in large part because of Lincoln. "When our Government and people shall bravely avow this to be an Abolition war," he declared, "then the country will be safe." Although he concedes that Lincoln and his Secretary of State Seward "have made progress," he reminds his predominately white female audience at New York City's Cooper Institute that Lincoln had "avowed his determination to protect and defend the slaveholder's right to plunder the black laborer of his hard earnings" and that Seward had once assured slaveholders "that no slave should gain his freedom by this war." At a moment when it appeared that the North had a significant military advantage, Douglass wanted Lincoln to press that advantage, proclaiming at the end of the speech: "no war but an Abolition war, no peace but an Abolition peace."¹³

Perhaps because Lincoln wanted Douglass's support for his reelection campaign, the president summoned Douglass to the White House on 25 August 1864 to discuss exactly what Douglass had been urging him to do all along: deploy both the free blacks and the slaves to deal a killing blow to the South. In the 1881 *Life and Times* account of the second meeting, Douglass says nothing about his initial hesitations about supporting Lincoln's reelection. Lincoln, whom Douglass presents at this point in *Life and Times* as having "a deeper moral conviction against slavery than I had ever seen before in anything spoken or written by him," now wants Douglass's opinion on "the means most desirable to be employed outside the army to induce the slaves in the rebel states to come within the federal lines." Honored to be asked, and believing that he is the man to do the job, Douglass agrees to help Lincoln put into effect a plan drawn from the playbook of the militant John Brown. Douglass describes the scene:

I listened with the deepest interest and profoundest satisfaction, and, at his suggestion, agreed to undertake the organizing a band of scouts, composed of colored men, whose business should be somewhat after the original plan of John Brown, to go into the rebel states, beyond the lines of our armies, and carry news of emancipation, and urge the slaves to come within our boundaries.¹⁴

Douglass states that as events turned out, he was not needed to serve this commission, which would have inevitably involved him with black violence. But he remains silent on why Lincoln ultimately failed to give him a commission, either for this operation or as an officer in the Union army. Lincoln's decision not to give Douglass a commission seems even more mysterious in light of the appointment of the black nationalist Martin Delany as the first black major in the Union army early in 1865. Why did Lincoln turn to Delany over Douglass?

One possible answer to this question is that Lincoln found Delany to be more impressive than Douglass. Although Douglass in *Life and Times* portrays himself as the only African American meeting with Lincoln during the Civil War, Lincoln actually met with numerous African Americans.¹⁵ Indeed, shortly after he met with Douglass in August 1864 to ask how the southern black slaves could be deployed to bring about the end of the war, Lincoln met with Delany to ask the same question. Delany described his meeting with the president in an "as told to" biography published in 1868. In interesting ways, Delany's account resembles the account that Douglass would give years later in *Life and Times*.

In Frances Rollin's 1868 *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*, Delany says that the main reason he got the commission as major was because it was he (Delany) who proposed the most compelling plan to Lincoln for encouraging black insurrection among the Southern slaves. According to Delany, he said to Lincoln: "I propose, sir, an army of blacks, commanded entirely by black officers, . . . this army to penetrate through the heart of the South, and make conquests, with the banner of Emancipation unfurled, proclaiming freedom as they go, . . . keeping this banner unfurled until every slave in the south is free, according to your proclamation." Lincoln exultantly responds: "This . . . is the very thing I have been looking and hoping for; but nobody offered it. I have thought it over and over again; I have talked about it; I hoped and prayed for it." And he asks, "Will you take command?"¹⁶

Delany's plan would have involved considerably more violence than Douglass's. So perhaps Delany got the commission because Lincoln was more willing to deploy a terroristic sort of violence than Douglass was willing to allow. But another possible answer to the question of why Delany was chosen over Douglass is that in 1862, when Lincoln was pushing his plan of black colonization to Central and South America, he or one of his advisors read Delany's 1854 "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," which argued for black emigration, and he, or someone on his staff, was so impressed by the speech it was reprinted in the 1862 Congressional Record.¹⁷ Ironically, then, Lincoln may have chosen Delany over Douglass because he regarded him as something of a fellow traveler in colonizationism (even though Delany supported selective black emigration and not forced colonization). That said, Lincoln abandoned his plan by 1864, and Delany himself set aside his emigrationism to serve as a major and then work in the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina.

Given that, as Benjamin Quarles shows, Lincoln appointed many other blacks to military commissions, Lincoln may have decided against offering Douglass a commission because he thought that he was too independent or too radical or just someone whom he would never be able to control.¹⁸ Or the failure of Douglass to get the commission could be regarded as a metaphor for the missing side of the Douglass-Lincoln relationship; it is Lincoln's "story" about Douglass. Maybe Lincoln had not quite taken to Douglass as much as Douglass thought and maybe Lincoln was simply being strategic in meeting with Douglass during his second campaign for the presidency. What we do know is that the Douglass-Lincoln relationship was a bit more troubled than Douglass lets on, and at least one

important facet of the relationship would appear to be that each person knew how to make use of the other. That said, there does seem to have been a coming together of these two great leaders on the occasion of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, although again we mainly have to take Douglass's word for it.

In Douglass's account in *Life and Times*, by the time of the second inauguration he had become one of Lincoln's strongest supporters, and he was there in attendance on 4 March 1865 for the delivery of the Second Inaugural Address, which he describes as "remarkable." Desirous of passing along his praise to Lincoln, but barred from the reception, Douglass challenges the White House security officers, and someone (probably not Lincoln) gives him clearance. Douglass describes the scene in his 1881 autobiography:

Mr. Lincoln stood, in his grand simplicity, and homely beauty. Recognizing me, even before I reached him, he exclaimed, so that all around could hear him, "Here comes my friend Douglass." Taking me by the hand, he said, "I am glad to see you. I saw you in the crowd today, listening to my inaugural address; how did you like it?" I said, "Mr. Lincoln, I must not detain you with my poor opinion, when there are thousands waiting to shake hands with you." No, no," he said, "you must stop a little Douglass; there is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours. I want to know what you think of it?" I replied, "Mr. Lincoln, that was a sacred effort." "I am glad you liked it!" he said, and I passed on feeling that any man, however distinguished, might well regard himself honored by such expressions, from such a man.

Whether or not this is completely, factually true, there is something moving about Douglass's account of the black and white leaders finding such common cause. Just four pages later in the autobiography, Douglass laments, "the assassination of Abraham Lincoln – a man so amiable, so kind, humane, and honest, that one is at a loss to know how he could have had an enemy on earth."¹⁹

Douglass was hardly an enemy, but even after the assassination he would continue to raise questions about Lincoln's handling of the war, positing that Lincoln's initial reluctance to use violence in the service of antislavery had something to do with his racism (expressed most clearly in his desire to colonize blacks). And although he presented Lincoln in *Life and Times* as a great emancipator, he refused to give him that honor in his speeches before the publication of his 1881 autobiography. In his 3 August 1869 British West Indian Emancipation speech, for example, Douglass

directly raised the issue of Lincoln's role in emancipation and conveyed his continued skepticism. He asked his audience in Medina, New York:

Whence came the abolition of slavery? The theologian says, God. The politician says, Lincoln. The abolitionist says, Garrison, The statesman says, the war. To me the result is no miracle. . . . The evil contained the seeds of its own destruction . . . The world might have permitted slavery a good while longer, but for the pride and ambition of its votaries. Mr. Garrison would not abolish it. Mr. Lincoln did not wish to interfere with it.²⁰

Indeed, it is Lincoln's unwillingness to interfere with slavery, at least in the opening years of the Civil War, that is one of the subjects of Douglass's greatest speech on Lincoln, "The Freedmen's Monument to Abraham Lincoln," which he delivered in Washington, DC, on 14 April 1876, just five years before publishing the first edition of *Life and Times*.

To set the scene, in 1876, the year of the nation's Centennial, Douglass was invited to be the main speaker honoring the unveiling of the sculptor Thomas Ball's The Freedmen's Monument, a sculpture paid for by donations from the freed blacks. The sculpture depicted Lincoln as a benevolent Christ or Moses or God figure offering his blessings over the body of a manacled black male slave based on an actual fugitive slave from Missouri. The hierarchical image of the lordly Lincoln freeing the objectified, passive slave spoke to general cultural understandings of blacks' indebtedness to Lincoln. Douglass hated the image of the manacled, kneeling slave, so he came to the lecture with some real animus against Ball's sculpture, along with a desire to tell the truth about Lincoln, race, and slavery to the audience assembled in Washington DC's Lincoln Park. And what an audience it was! In attendance for the occasion were members of the president's cabinet, Supreme Court judges, numerous senators and congressmen, hundreds of ordinary citizens, and President Ulysses S. Grant, whom Douglass very much admired. In his 1881 *Life and Times*, Douglass says that "the part taken by me in the ceremonies of that grand occasion . . . rank[s] among the most interesting incidents of my life." And although he does not actually discuss what he said in his speech, he writes that "[o]ccasions like this have done wonders in the removal of popular prejudice and lifting into consideration the colored race."²¹ Speaking in 1876, Douglass felt a special urgency about "lifting into consideration the colored race," for Reconstruction was failing. Douglass's approach to removing popular prejudice rested in part on not genuflecting before Lincoln, not becoming the oratorical analogue to the image of the kneeling, shackled slave.

So Douglass unshackled himself and spoke bravely and honestly, presenting a boldly historicist picture of Lincoln as indifferent to the plight of the black slaves and intent on appeasing the racists of the border states. This is the temporizing Lincoln that Douglass criticizes in his early 1860s newspaper writings and not the Lincoln he sanitizes in the 1881 *Life and Times*. Douglass states at the beginning of the speech:

[T]ruth compels me to admit even here in the presence of the monument we have erected in his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model.... He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the last years of his administration to deny, postpone and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people, to promote the welfare of the white people of his country.

And Douglass does not stop there. Lincoln, Douglass says to his distinguished audience of 1876, while reaching out to the African Americans in the crowd, “strangely told us that we were the cause of the war; when he still more strangely told us to leave the land in which we were born,” and even “after accepting our services as colored soldiers, he refused to retaliate when we were murdered as colored prisoners.” Additionally, Lincoln “was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master, and to suppress a slave rising for liberty, though his guilty masters were already in arms against the Government.”²² This critique of Lincoln as willing to appease the slave states by returning fugitive slaves was especially cutting given that the black man in the Freedmen's Monument was a fugitive slave from the border state of Missouri. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did not in fact free him—1865 state legislation did. In effect, Douglass was saying that Thomas Ball got things all wrong.

And yet even with Douglass's bold critique of Lincoln's hesitancy about fighting a war of emancipation, the speech remains one of the most profound and moving mediations that we have on Lincoln, in large part because Douglass's rhetorical tactics are so keenly and sympathetically historicist. The thrust of the first half of the lecture is to situate Lincoln in his mid-nineteenth-century culture in which most whites regarded blacks as not quite human and hardly their equals and thus not worth dying for. Douglass presents these views as cultural givens and then makes a remarkable turn in the second half of the lecture to underscore that Lincoln's greatness was about being able to make the decision that would “free his country from the great crime of slavery” from within a cultural mindset that had kept most white American political leaders from imagining such

a possibility. Douglass is at his historicist best when he tells his auditors not to judge Lincoln on the basis of this or that action but to consider the big picture: "We saw him, measured him, and estimated him," Douglass remarks, "not by stray utterances to injudicious and tedious delegations who often tried his patience; not by isolated facts torn from their connection; not by any partial and imperfect glimpses, caught at inopportune moments; but by a broad survey, in the light of the stern logic of great events." From this perspective, Douglass insists, "it was enough for us that Abraham Lincoln was at the head of a great movement, and was in living and earnest sympathy with that movement; which, in the nature of things, must go on TILL SLAVERY SHOULD BE UTTERLY and forever abolished in the United States." Notably, before the president, his cabinet, members of the Supreme Court, and numerous congressmen and senators, Douglass remarks that forms of slavery still exist in the United States, and he enlists the spirit of the martyred Lincoln to help him continue the fight for racial equality. Douglass goes on to praise Lincoln for ending the slave trade in Washington, DC, allowing 200,000 African Americans to fight for their liberty, and being the first American president to recognize the black Republic of Haiti. It is only at the end of his speech that he lets the personal come to the fore. "[N]o man who knew Abraham Lincoln," says Douglass, the man who would regularly let the world know he knew Lincoln, "could hate him, but because of his fidelity to Union and liberty, he is doubly dear to us, and will be precious forever."²³

Douglass told many tales of Lincoln, offering conflicting views on his management of the Civil War and various but generally complementary stories about their meetings. Here Douglass offers judgment, and that judgment is, overall, good. Collectively, Douglass's writings about Lincoln evince anger, conflict, hope, and admiration, but what is most striking about the writings are Douglass's canny and often moving efforts to make use of his friendship or association with Lincoln to continue his fight for racial equality. Douglass was no manacled slave looking up to a beneficent Lincoln in gratitude for the things he did and did not do. He was a rhetorically gifted political visionary who, as his 1876 speech shows, had a clear-eyed view of Lincoln. But violence remained a sticking point, which is why Douglass continued to tell many tales about John Brown as well. Thus, near the end of his 1881 *Life and Times*, after his chapters on Lincoln, Douglass reported on his pilgrimage to Harpers Ferry to honor the memory of Brown. Joined at Storer College by Andrew J. Hunter, the Virginia state attorney who had prosecuted Brown, Douglass gave a speech that he describes as "not merely defending John Brown, but

extolling him as a hero and martyr to the cause of liberty.”²⁴ The cult of Lincoln may have offered the greatest hope for national reconciliation, but at a time in which blacks were steadily losing their civil rights, Douglass in his 1881 autobiography made clear that John Brown, too, spoke to the current moment. Sandwiching his stories of meeting with Lincoln between his account of John Brown’s attack on Harpers Ferry and later celebration of that attack, Douglass offered his readers an implied three-word warning about becoming overly sentimental about Lincoln: John Brown lives.

Notes

- 1 Frederick Douglass, “Is It Right and Wise to Kill a Kidnapper!” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* (2 June 1854), 2; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), p. 191; Douglass, “John Brown’s Contributions to the Abolition Movement: An Address Delivered in Boston, Massachusetts, on 3 December 1860,” *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, 5 vols., John W. Blassingame et al. (eds.) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979–1992), vol. III, p. 416 (hereafter cited as *FDP*). On Douglass’s endorsement of violent responses to slavery after breaking with William Lloyd Garrison, see Robert S. Levine, “Frederick Douglass, War, Haiti,” *PMLA* 124.5 (2009), 1864–1868.
- 2 For a perceptive discussion of Douglass and the violence of the Civil War, see David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass’s Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), esp. chs. 3 and 5. This chapter draws on my *The Lives of Frederick Douglass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); for a fuller discussion of Douglass, Lincoln and John Brown, see chapter 4.
- 3 Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, rev. ed. 1892; New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 325, 335, 336.
- 4 See, for example, Paul Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick, *Douglass and Lincoln: How a Revolutionary Black Leader and a Reluctant Liberator Struggled to End Slavery and Save the Union* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008); James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007); and David W. Blight, “Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: A Relationship in Language, Politics, and Memory” in *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), pp. 76–90. For a study of the two leaders on a larger canvas, see John Stauffer, *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Twelve, 2008).
- 5 Douglass, “The Proclamation and a Negro Army: An Address Delivered in New York, New York, on 6 February 1863,” *FDP*, vol. III, p. 562.

- 6 Walt Whitman, "The Death of Abraham Lincoln" (1879) in *Memoranda during the War: Written on the Spot in 1863-'65*, Peter Coviello (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 157.
- 7 Douglass, "The Inaugural Address," *Douglass' Monthly* (April 1861), 1; "The Progress of the War," *Douglass' Monthly* (Sept. 1861), 1; "The President and His Speeches," *Douglass' Monthly* (Sept. 1862), 1; "The Slaveholders Rebellion," *Douglass' Monthly* (Aug. 1862), 1; "Notes on the War," *Douglass' Monthly* (July 1861), 1; "Fighting the Rebels with Only One Hand," *Douglass' Monthly* (Sept. 1861), 1; and "Speech of Frederick Douglass on the War," *Douglass' Monthly* (Feb. 1862), 1. On Lincoln's interest in black colonization, see Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), pp. 127–129, 184–186, 221–240.
- 8 Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*, pp. xiii–xxii.
- 9 Douglass, *Life and Times*, pp. 347, 348, 349. Douglass's broadside, "Men of Color, To Arms!" first appeared in the March 1863 issue of *Douglass' Monthly*. On Douglass as a recruiting agent, see William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), ch. 17.
- 10 Douglass, "The Commander-in-Chief and His Black Soldiers," *Douglass' Monthly* (Aug. 1863), 1.
- 11 For a useful discussion of this unpublished letter, see Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*, pp. 211–213.
- 12 Douglass, "Emancipation, Racism, and the Work before Us: An Address Delivered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on 4 December 1863," *FDP*, vol. III, pp. 606–609.
- 13 Douglass, "The Mission of the War: An Address Delivered in New York, New York, on 13 January 1864," *FDP*, vol. IV, pp. 9, 22, 24.
- 14 Douglass, *Life and Times*, pp. 358, 359.
- 15 Lincoln met with Bishop Daniel Payne, Sojourner Truth, and many other African Americans, including small and large delegations; see Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 194–210.
- 16 Frank A. Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1868), pp. 168, 169, 170. (Rollin deliberately used "Frank" instead of Frances to conceal her female identity.)
- 17 On Delany and Lincoln, see Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 215–223.
- 18 In his classic *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1953), Benjamin Quarles states that there were approximately 100 commissioned black officers by the end of the Civil War.
- 19 Douglass, *Life and Times*, pp. 362, 366, 370.
- 20 Douglass, "We Are Not Quite Free: An Address Delivered at Medina, New York, on 3 August 1863," *FDP*, vol. IV, pp. 230–231.
- 21 Douglass, *Life and Times*, p. 418.

- 22 Douglass, "The Freedmen's Monument to Abraham Lincoln: An Address Delivered in Washington, D.C., on 14 April 1876," *FDP*, vol. IV, pp. 431, 433, 432. Oakes calls this 1876 speech Douglass's "most complex and compelling evaluation of Abraham Lincoln" (*The Radical and the Republican*, p. 266).
- 23 Douglass, "The Freedmen's Monument," pp. 436, 433–434, 440.
- 24 Douglass, *Life and Times*, p. 451.

*Mary Boykin Chesnut: Epic and Miniature**Julia A. Stern*

In March 1864, Southern intellectual and Civil War saloniste Mary Boykin Chesnut attended a Richmond prisoner exchange, joined by Confederate President Jefferson Davis and exiled Irish nationalist John Mitchel. After Davis addressed the assembled crowd, Chesnut spotted another group of Southern luminaries: “the Lees were all there – stood in a group in full fig [sic] – Custis, Rooney, Robert, Chapman Leigh, Mary Agnes, Mildred. Custis will be gazetted in a few days major general and put in command of Richmond.”¹ The appearance of the general’s extensive family, men in uniform, and women passionately dedicated to the Confederate cause rallied Chesnut’s spirits. Turning her gaze on the redeemed captives, she found shattered-looking men who appeared “as if they had been dead to this world for years.” The contrast could not have been more striking: Chesnut identified Lee and his soldier sons as quasi-Olympic gods, while across the field, she registered their antitypes, ruined shells dragged back from the underworld. In her revised 1880s account of this seminal 1864 moment, Chesnut had inserted herself into the epic tradition.²

Mary Boykin Chesnut drafted and revised the most encyclopedic and searching Civil War narrative in American letters.³ Yet 130-plus years after she left it unfinished at her death, the book continues to be misunderstood as a primary-source artifact, mistaken for a massive journal rather than acknowledged as a self-conscious work of art cast in diary form. I begin this essay by untangling the complicated textual history of Chesnut’s revised narrative. In what was the era of realism, she had deployed a fragmented form that went unrecognized by her first editors, who “smoothed” her prose into traditional paragraphs and pages. Chesnut crafted her revised Civil War epic from thousands of what she called “scraps,” both short and occasionally longer bursts of battlefield reports, home-front observations, anecdotes concerning her elite Confederate social circle, and personal commentary about family members and beloved friends.

Recognizing the narrative virtuosity abiding in these smaller and larger shards, distinguished Southern historian Michael O'Brien has gestured toward the idea that Chesnut is a modernist writer *avant le lettre*.⁴

On the vast frame of the epic, Chesnut built her revised narrative from miniatures. With lapidary care, she set anecdote against observation, dramatic scene beside factual assertion. In a revised entry for June 1862, Chesnut describes an old Episcopal minister in her Columbia, South Carolina, milieu making conversation with her friend Mrs. Haskell. [Rev. Shand]: "Madame, you have two sons in the army." [Mrs. Haskell]: "I **have had six** sons in the army!" (398, emphasis mine). This seemingly simple exchange, in which Mrs. Haskell corrects Rev. Shand's information about the number of her soldier offspring, has a subtext: from the beginning of the war, all of Mrs. Haskell's six sons have remained "before the cannon," in combat (400). Her beloved Alex, grievously wounded in the eye, has been billeted home, only to discover that his young bride, newly delivered of their first child, has perished days before his return.

Chesnut juxtaposes the weighty with the callously venal: "To go down to **meaner** themes," she reports on the petty squabbling of the executive council, a body to which her husband (unhappily) has been appointed, tasked with curbing the power of Frances Pickens, South Carolina's incompetent governor (398). Inserted next to the story of Mrs. Haskell's continuing sacrifice is the anecdote of South Carolina planters protesting to the council that the Confederate government has requisitioned a proportion of all slaves for construction of coastal defenses. Chesnut explains that as owners of more than twenty bonds people, these men have been exempted from service in the Confederate army. Such immunity originates in the government's determination that if masters and overseers were to depart for duty, an insufficient number of white men would remain to scrutinize and discipline slave populations, increasing the danger of uprisings and flight. Now these slaveholders are objecting to the fact that some of their valuable "property" is being redirected to the cause that many of them assiduously have avoided serving.

In focusing on the sorrows of bereaved friends and what she believes is the unpatriotic behavior of self-interested neighbors, Chesnut casts a bright light on the tangled paradox of slaveholding. Ideologically speaking, the Confederate army is at war with Federal forces to protect the "independence" and "property" of the South, particularly that of its elite white planters. Yet some members of the master class are more invested in retaining their bound black slaves at home than in participating in the ranks of men risking their lives to defend – along with "states rights" – that

very privilege of slaveholding.⁵ Across reams of manuscript pages, the dialectical patterning found in this passage and numerous others “mak[es] new” and intellectually electric the compendium, a literary form privileged by the Victorians, both English and American.⁶ Simultaneously, close inspection of Chesnut’s work reveals it inching toward a proto-modernist fragment-shoring aesthetic, per O’Brien.

Chesnut’s Epic Text

No edition, not even C. Vann Woodward’s 1981 Pulitzer Prize winning *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, corresponds exactly to the fifty-four copybook manuscripts of Chesnut’s revised Civil War writing. In addition to thousands of narrative pages, these notebooks contain political campaign buttons, abstruse newspaper clippings, pressed flowers, snippets of verse, ribbons, and so on – items that Woodward catalogued but could not include in his magisterial volume. Accordingly, we can say that an exact facsimile of Chesnut’s manuscripts does not and cannot exist in print. This voluminous narrative material remained unpublished in Chesnut’s lifetime, and the edition bowdlerized and brought out by her literary executor Isabella Martin (1905) has been misunderstood for more than a century as having been written “to-the-minute” (as Samuel Richardson described the fictional Clarissa’s epistolary energy). Thus, scholars have mistaken the narrative as affording a transparent window onto Southern bellum politics, military strategy, and home-front culture. Chesnut’s 1905 editors never disclose the fact that the chronicle they are promoting as a “diary” in fact was revised, recast, and reshaped twenty years after Confederate surrender.

As the wife of James Chesnut Jr. – initially aide de camp to Jefferson Davis, who ended the war as a brigadier general of South Carolina Cavalry Reserves – Mary Chesnut traveled Southern capitals with the Confederate Cabinet and their families. Witnessing important events such as the fall of Fort Sumter firsthand, she began jotting down her impressions of the war in a red leather diary during 1861, 1862, and much of 1865. Scholars believe that between chronic angina pectoris (hardening of the arteries, from which she ultimately died), gastric fever (typhoid, which afflicted her stomach for years), and grueling travel demands, Chesnut did not keep the diary in 1863 and 1864; it is likely that she burned any pages penned in the earlier year. Ironically, these inchoate, original scribbblings became among the last of her writings to reach print, thanks to the labors of editors C. Vann Woodward and Elisabeth

Muhlenfeld, who in 1984 co-published *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*.

The literary history of Chesnut's "big book," the revised narrative, which she created in the 1870s and early 1880s by expanding and transforming those early diary entries, is a more intricate affair. The writer had put away her 1860s diary at the end of the war, hoping to return to and revise it; she wanted to rework certain scenes and events into a literary rather than purely documentary account of what she had seen, heard, and felt about Confederate politics, martial strategy, and civilian life. Shifting from a first- to third-person narrative voice, Chesnut took small kernels from the 1860s diary and expanded them into full-fledged dramatic episodes; she added completely new material; and she transferred what in the 1860s had been her own thoughts and expressions into the mouths of her 1880s protagonists.

Casting the narrative in diurnal form, the writer gave her project a tripartite architecture, with a focus on three representative Chesnut men: her imposing and larger-than-life father-in-law, Colonel James Chesnut Sr., who figures most prominently in the revised narrative's opening third; her stoic and devoted husband, General James Chesnut Jr., the focus of her book's central section; and her beloved young nephew, cavalry Captain John Chesnut III, whose presence organizes the closing third of the narrative. These men respectively represent the South's past, present, and future.⁷

Perhaps most significant to Chesnut's literary ambitions for revision was her orchestration of epic themes, from the sublime to the quotidian. She used epithets for her favorite characters: nephew Johnny was "the Cool Captain"; niece Serena was "Princess Bright Eyes"; and she herself was "Cassandra" and "The Inquisitor General." She created catalogues conventional for wartime and uniquely personal: of the Confederate dead; of the seeded foods that gave pleasure to her dulled, invalid palette; of the marriageable young women in her circle; of the Kentucky Generals – once counting fourteen of them in her Columbia drawing room – including dashing Cavalry phenomena General John Morgan; and of novels by George Eliot that she treasured, particularly *Romola*, the story of one heroic woman's civic and intellectual works in Renaissance Florence, where proto-Protestant religious reform and Catholic Church opposition become a literary analogue for the war shattering the United States.

The writer offered meditations on divinity and theology in her treatment of various forms of religious practice during wartime. Although brought up in Camden, South Carolina's Bethesda Presbyterian Church,

Chesnut had enjoyed weekly lunches seated next to the Bishop of Charleston during her time as unofficial “head girl” at boarding school. She also was fascinated by theological conversations conducted with a well-educated Catholic landlady, Mrs. McMahon, from whom she rented rooms in Columbia. During the war she worshipped in a spontaneous and eclectic fashion, often joining the Jefferson Davises at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Richmond. The *haute volée*, Chesnut’s favorite euphemism for her privileged set, largely were Episcopalians and Presbyterians.

Methodists, in whose practices she also was interested, inhabited a lower social caste from that which she had come. Recognized for lively, voluble participation during worship, some Methodist congregations allowed slaves into church membership (seated in the balcony) or provided bound blacks with religious services in other venues, such as on individual plantations. While living in Columbia during several different epochs of the war, Chesnut attended Methodist rites with her future literary executor and editor Isabella Martin, whose father was the local Wesley-ite pastor. But the variety of Methodism that most enthralled the writer was the service conducted every other Sunday on Mulberry Plantation. There, the Rev. Manning Brown preached to her father-in-law’s bound black “people,” assisted by the slave class leader Jim Nelson. At one summer service, the congregation’s visceral movements, musicality, and responsiveness, highlighted by Nelson, brought Chesnut to tears, although she immediately disavowed the potential efficacy of the transformation Rev. Manning promised to the family’s numerous slave believers.⁸

In addition to her Christian worship, high church and low, Chesnut socialized with some of Columbia’s most prominent Jewish matrons. Her favorite such companion was “Mem” or Miriam Cohen, who had a son in the Confederate Army and a beautiful and marriageable daughter. Mem was brimming with tales of similarly privileged Jewish families affected by the war. Making a cameo appearance in Chesnut’s revised narrative in Richmond, 1864, was the figure Phoebe Yates Levy Pember, one of the South’s most prominent Jewish women. The genteelly impoverished widow of a Christian husband who had died very young, Pember moved to Richmond, where she ran a large ward at Chimborazo military hospital during the war, about which she wrote a fascinating memoir, *A Southern Woman’s Story* (1868).

But Chesnut’s most eminent Jewess was Pember’s sister Eugenia Levy Phillips, who had become notorious in 1861 for spying for the Confederacy in Alabama. Phillips was apprehended and sentenced to house arrest. After moving with her husband and children to New Orleans, which fell

to Benjamin Butler's Federal forces in 1862, Eugenia Phillips was charged with and arrested for laughing during a the funeral procession of a fallen Union officer. For this offense, the mother of eight was sentenced to serve three months imprisoned on barren Ship Island, off the coast of Gulfport, Mississippi. Although Phillips lived until 1905, her incarceration in a metal shed during conditions of extreme heat and bitter cold permanently ruined her health.

Celebrating the exploits of intrepid spy Eugenia Levy Phillips and stalwart nurse Phoebe Levy Pember marked only one way in which Chesnut revealed her feminist allegiances. While she never took up Seneca Falls-like activism (in fact, she was critical of all official ideological movements), the writer famously noted that marriage made slaves of females: "Surely women have a right to a maintenance even when they are penniless girls – before the wedding" (284). She also celebrated the prowess and ingenuity of Rose O'Neill Greenhow, a beautiful Washington widow whose boarding house clientele, including officers from the Union army, afforded her access to Yankee secrets pertaining to the first major battle of the war: "No doubt Mrs. Greenhow furnished Beauregard with the latest news of Federal movements – and so made the Manassas [Bull Run] fiasco [for the Union] a possibility. She sent us the enemy's plan. Everything she said proved true, numbers, route, &c&c" (167). Significant acts of female patriotism, Chesnut suggests across her book, take various forms in the Civil War South.

Chesnut's revised narrative is rich with this sort of historical and political detail, which always is seen through the lens of her domestic world. But her voracious reading also extended the scope of her universe, making it encyclopedic and also cosmopolitan. So in January 1865, three months before Lee's surrender, the writer imagines the Confederate army making a last stand: she alludes to "the Thermopylae business" (701) about which she has learned from devouring books on Greek military history. In the fifth century B.C. on a mountain pass, 700 united Spartans and Athenians held off 100,000 Persians for seven days before battling them to the death. Chesnut conjures Thermopylae three different times across the revised narrative, tying her Civil War experience to the great contests and invasions of classical history. In figuring the rebel "nation" in terms of fifth-century Athens or Augustan Rome, Southern political theorists bolstered the legitimacy and world-historical significance of their slaveholding republican endeavor.

Many of the figures she represented in the revised narrative outlived her passing in 1886, President Davis (1889) and General Johnston (1891) most

significantly. The idea that publication of her narrative would be deferred (should it happen at all) freed Chesnut to tackle the otherwise unspeakable subject of Confederate factionalism. The writer was convinced that Southern disunity had cost her "country" the war even before Southern numerical disadvantage began to take its toll. Dissent and in-fighting had fissured both the Confederate Congress and army from 1861 on. Before his ascension to high office, Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, had fierce detractors. They numbered, particularly, among those men who had opposed his candidacy for president, as well as those who had contested his views when he served as a U.S. senator from Mississippi and secretary of war in the Buchanan administration.

This negative dynamic also obtained in the Southern military, among figures like General Joseph Johnston, who by seniority should have outranked General Robert E. Lee. Johnston was outraged when Davis promoted the formidable younger general above himself and several other superior officers to lead what became the famous Army of Northern Virginia. Chesnut devotes many pages to the cavils of the Davis haters, as well as to Joe Johnston's ongoing bitterness toward President Davis and General Lee. She also closely tracks Johnston's irrational-seeming strategy of battle aversion and continual retreat to "preserve his armies." Johnston was loved by his men because he showed them the respect and humanity not demonstrated by generals like Braxton Bragg, who was known for his brutal discipline; in Bragg's corps, infractions were met by death sentences. Largely hated by the Confederate cabinet, General Johnston became a galling mote in the eye of Jefferson Davis as the war progressed.

What Chesnut called "family troubles in the house divided" referred both to the Confederacy's foundational disability and to life on Mulberry Plantation with her in-laws. Camden was where she spent all of her time when not traveling to and living in Montgomery, Richmond, and Columbia. Across the revised narrative, Chesnut writes about what we now would call the self-absorption or narcissism of the elder James and Mary Cox Chesnut and their assailing her for being, in her own words, a "childless wretch." Unfathomable to her was their disregard for her husband, one of only two Chesnut men in the extended family serving in the Confederate government and cavalry.

Chesnut returned over and over again to the problem of how, under crisis, a nation of self-interested citizens could function collectively without breaking apart. This ostensible political anxiety spoke also to Chesnut's domestic predicament. As the war's terrible realities unfolded, emotional fissures also began to divide the Chesnuts sharing the great house roof.

The theme of fracture thus operates at the political and the domestic levels of Chesnut's reworked manuscripts.

Oblique (in the revised narrative) and direct (in the diary jottings) evidence exists that Mulberry itself constituted a house divided. The writer aligns herself as a tough-minded realist stranded in a sea of romantic delusion; she assails sentimental thinking throughout her revised narrative; she identifies such "ostrich-headed" vision with her mother-in-law, who proclaims a rosy view of the world while simultaneously exercising her powerful intellect in a rigorous regime of reading works sometimes far from sunny and benign. The elder Mrs. Chesnut believed that some of these books were unsuitable for perusal by the rest of the family; accordingly, after finishing and pronouncing such works contraband, Mary Cox Chesnut would instruct the old colonel to lock them up in the library, if they could not be burned.

Chesnut elaborately limns her mother-in-law's disavowal of life's dark and sordid side, where white slave masters impregnate young women slaves, and "<<every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds, or pretends to think so>>" (29).⁹ Old Mrs. Chesnut, born to an elite, slaveholding, Philadelphia family around the epoch of independence,¹⁰ has had to digest a great deal of the "seamy side" to endure for nearly sixty years life on a great South Carolina slave plantation.

Chesnut puzzles over how, despite her mother-in-law's ongoing and sick-making "sentimental talk" about the family's love and reverence for James Jr., they have no interest in being present when he returns to Mulberry for his first leave from the army. The old colonel and Mrs. Chesnut cannot bear to cancel a journey to visit to Mrs. Reynolds, their widowed daughter, who lives only 30 miles away and whom they see regularly. James Jr. may be serving his country, and he may be their nominal heir, but given their childlessness, James Jr. and Mary Chesnut seem to conjure in the senior Chesnuts visions of the family line coming to an end.

In the ongoing grief over her childlessness – to say nothing of her in-laws' thoughtless perseveration on the topic – going "home" to Camden proved a bitter fate for Chesnut. She described these unwanted returns in terms of being sentenced to village life or being "sent down" like boys expelled from college. Indeed, Chesnut's melancholia, chronic throughout her adult life, had strong roots in place. Away from Mulberry, even when sick with bouts of gastric fever or heart trouble, she recovered far more

quickly than when at “home.” Excluded from domesticity by both her barrenness and the reality that her in-laws still ran Mulberry with iron fists, Chesnut functioned best away from her husband’s family in in the intentional kinship she created with her friends.

Those closest to her knew that Mary Chesnut was “keeping a journal,” although they little could imagine what its eventual revised size would be. As an epic, it included the writer’s invocation of poetic and oral culture through her quotation of favorite poems, popular songs, and even the funeral music, mostly from Handel’s “Saul,” which became a grim background refrain every day during wartime. And as Homer and Virgil each featured a trip to the underworld, Mary Chesnut provided at least two. The first descent involved a grim visit to sister Sarah Amelia’s plantation in rural Alabama, where the family had lost two of its three children to fever in the course of only two weeks. Chesnut describes her departure as an escape from the land of the dead. The second involved her retreat at the very end of the war from a refugee stay beyond Sherman’s track in North Carolina. Returning to Mulberry, the Chesnuts must cross the Wateree River by ferry, but they possess no money to pay the toll. This was their crossing of the River Styx, but unlike Charon’s passengers, they had to go on credit, a humiliating twist on the mythic motif. Half of the plantation house had been destroyed by the Yankee’s; the other half remained perfectly intact. Chesnut found the now widowed old colonel, 94 years of age and almost blind, staggering through the ruins of what had been his elegant home. Led by his former slave Scipio – whose physical magnificence Chesnut described as resembling that of Hercules – James Sr. evokes King Lear in the final act of Shakespeare’s greatest tragedy. To the writer’s eagle eye, he was a “splendid wreck” (815).

Chesnut saw grandeur overlain with heartbreak in figures like the diminished old colonel; her gift involved the ability to translate this insight into art. Scholars now accept that Chesnut meant to publish her revised narrative: in bequeathing the manuscripts to spinster schoolteacher Isabella Martin, the writer was handing off her manuscript to the person best suited to guide it into print. Martin collaborated with a New York writer who had published a book on the Civil War South, Myrta Lockett Avery, and by 1905, they had made over the voluminous manuscripts into a book they called *A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, Wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States Senator from South Carolina, 1859–1861, and Afterward, Aide to Jefferson Davis and Brigadier General in the Confederate Army* – a title Chesnut would have loathed.¹¹ Martin-Avery also serialized five sections of their book in the *Saturday Evening Post*.¹² In

my book-length study of Chesnut's revised Civil War narrative, I speculate that the *Post*, a genteel publication with a middle-brow audience, likely was read across the turn of the century South by families like those of the Williamses (Chesnut's descendants through her sister Kate Miller Williams and her brother-in-law-David R. Williams III, James Chesnut Jr.'s nephew), as well as the households of the young William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell.¹³

Published by Appleton of New York, the Martin-Avery edition was based exclusively on Chesnut's final, unfinished 1880s revisions, although the editors never indicate that there were at least three historical layers to the manuscripts from which they had been working: 1860s diary jottings; late 1870s "smoothing over" of those scribbles into a coherent narrative; and 1880–1883 thorough-going revisions, including the development of dramatic tableaux not recorded in the 1860s diaries. Thus, it is unclear whether the two women, along with Ben Ames Williams, a novelist who in 1949 published his "revised" version of Chesnut's work, fully fathomed that what they were bringing to print was not Mary Chesnut's "to the minute" 1860s observations about life lived at the center of the Confederate government.

Instead, it is likely that Chesnut's editors believed that the revisionary work she had done in the 1880s only "touched up" the bellum jottings. Martin-Avery certainly had few qualms about their own "polishing": they bowdlerized important content, omitting, for example, anything that had to do with the "seamy side" of slavery, as Chesnut called it. Thus, the editorial pair excised entirely the material pertaining to the murder of elderly Chesnut cousin Betsy Witherspoon by her black bonds people, one of the most important episodes in the thousands of manuscript pages of the revised narrative. In the episode of Betsy Witherspoon's murder by her slaves, I see Chesnut attempting to work out how an ostensibly "kind" mistress could have become victim to a miniature, murderous, uprising. The Witherspoon murder offers a kind of limit case to Locke's notion that "slavery is a state of war," no matter how purportedly benign its lived forms.¹⁴

Williams restored these remarkable sections, but he took liberties with Chesnut's prose style and actually fashioned an introduction to the book that was entirely his own. Under his editorial care, the massive volume feels massaged into a quasi-novelistic account with little of the self-consciously fragmented texture of Chesnut's original prose style. Foundational historians of slavery like Eugene Genovese continued to read *The Diary from Dixie* (most often in the 1905 version) as primary source material, quoting

passages from Martin-Avary as if they were invoking antebellum tax or census records rather than a self-consciously crafted literary work.

It was only when C. Vann Woodward, the nation's preeminent expert on the Jim Crow era, restored Chesnut's text to its manuscript status of 1883–1886 that the academic community began to understand their own confusion over Mary Chesnut's "big book." Woodward came to realize that the 1880s revisions were far more expansive and novelistic in their treatment of Chesnut's Civil War milieu. They also omitted insights and associations that made the 1860s diaries trenchantly and, occasionally, witheringly observed. To solve the dilemma of "which Chesnut" texts constituted the "real" – final? original? un-bowdlerized? – manuscripts, Woodward made a bold decision, one that angered archival purists. He would publish the complete revised 1880s texts but would include an elaborate editorial apparatus in which cognate passages from the 1860s diary jottings were included to shed additional light on her revisionary process. These bracketed quotations reveal the ways in the which the writer tempered her 1860s-era rage for the purposes of a more conciliatory, "romance of reunion" inflected 1880s book.¹⁵ Chesnut's circumspection afforded more generous readings of persons and events and protected reputations, from her father-in-law, about whom it was gossiped that he had produced children with his slaves, to military figures such as General Joseph E. Johnston, with whose policies she disagreed.

Mary Chesnut's narrative voice – incisive, sardonic, wickedly funny, and heartbroken – allows us to imagine the adult writer in fairly palpable terms. She was known for her searching intellect, razor-sharp wit, and personal charisma. She was well educated, remarkably so for an elite white planter-politician's daughter, studying at Madame Talvande's School for Girls in Charleston. A French creole refugee from the Haitian Revolution, Talvande brought several biracial women to serve as teachers alongside her. Her establishment was known across the South for the intellectual rigor of its curriculum and its genteel atmosphere.

Chesnut biographer Elisabeth Muhlenfeld believes that the young Mary Boykin Miller befriended several of these mixed race Haitian women; unusual for a Southern girl, these relationships may have formed her non-traditional ideas about slavery and racial difference.¹⁶ Chesnut reports in her revised narrative that she became interested in educating blacks during her childhood: she was teaching Miller family slaves to read at nine years old. At thirteen she also witnessed her father, in financial straits just before he died, sell off his Mississippi cotton plantation and all the slaves who worked it; this reality probably involved the separation of families, which

would entail soul-shattering grief in the Miller slave community. Thus Mary Chesnut knew firsthand both the reality of slaveholding in relatively benign conditions and the horror it involved when those circumstances changed. Given this backstory, Chesnut's roundup-entry for 29 June 1861 sums up the complexity of her position on emancipation: "slavery has to go of course, and joy go with it" (88).

While Chesnut never quite shook off the romantic racist views of her class, she knew that slavery was wrong, believed it should and would be abolished, and spent most of the war in the company of the twenty-something Preston daughters, children of her dearest friends, John and Caroline Preston. The three sisters and their two brothers, both volunteers in the Confederate army, all were vocally antislavery; this even included the much doted-on youngest, Willie Preston, who tragically died in combat in July 1864. In Chesnut's salon – which centered around the brilliant and accomplished Buck, Mary, and Tudie Preston, but was also attended by Confederate generals and their staffs, as well as distinguished Southern writers and journalists – antislavery was a recurring topic of conversation.

Unlike some of her privileged peers, Chesnut was conscious of the precarious status of the planter elite, particularly by 1864, when Sherman was burning his way across the central and coastal South. The writer perfectly understood that her love of luxury depended on the always tenuous premise that the South must remain a slave republic. Thus, she could make a remark about the necessity of emancipation, as above, but also could describe powerful tableaux of the "joy" that "would go with" slavery's demise.¹⁷ It is my sense that even as early as 1861, Chesnut saw that the war might be unwinnable for the South. Unlike many of her neighbors and friends, she had a keen understanding of the numerical odds at stake: 9 million people, almost half of them African Americans held in bondage, had a slim chance of defeating a nation of 20 million souls.

Old Mrs. Chesnut died in the spring of 1864, and without her, Mulberry became an uncanny place. While the writer suffered under the elder woman's disapproving judgment, she admired her mother-in-law's fierce and powerful intellect, as well as her salutary effects on her father-in-law, who idealized his wife for nearly seventy years of marriage. But Chesnut is no romantic, understanding the transformative effects of trauma on those she loves. Her own experience has come to reveal how identity might undergo metamorphosis in a time of war. In a fragment for summer 1864, she tells a remarkable story of going unrecognized by

the proprietress of a railroad way station, a woman with whom she had attended school in Camden as a girl. Epic epithets ever at the ready, the writer dubs her interlocutor "Speckled Peach," in honor of the woman's brazen manners and less than creamy complexion. Not realizing that she is dealing with Mary Chesnut of Mulberry, the railroad proprietress assesses the writer's tattered "Confederate balmoral" plaid petticoat peeking through the rents in her skirt and determines that she is not welcome to rest in the adjacent hotel; the flabbergasted Chesnut speculates that she has been identified as a woman of ill repute. "I am Mrs. Chesnut!" she exclaims, biting her tongue to keep from raising her voice, only to be met with "which Mrs. Chesnut? I know both."

Incredulous, the writer replies that old Mrs. Chesnut recently has died; what is buried alive, here, is that Mrs. Chesnut *file*s has been mistaken for a ninety-year-old woman. Although facially scared by her bouts with typhoid, Mary Boykin Chesnut is only in her early forties. After eventually reminding the woman that they had been childhood classmates, Speckled Peach opines, "heaven sakes, woman! but you are broke!!!" This class charivari proves chastening to the writer. She has become Odysseus, King of Ithaca, returned in the rags of a beggar. Recognized only by his ancient dog, Argos, who immediately thereafter dies, the great warrior and survivor, like Chesnut, is temporarily "no one." Earlier in the revised narrative, Chesnut had described getting family cartes de visite: "Mr. Chesnut very good – mine like a washerwoman."¹⁸ Once slated to become the mistress of Mulberry, Mary Chesnut has come to resemble a laundress, or worse. That she can recognize and laugh at the self beneath that mask is the important part of the anecdote, for war has taught her indelible lessons. Redemption abides in loving attachments, and resilience is the greatest gift, enabling Mary Chesnut to "look defeat in the face" (142) and to transform it into art.

Notes

- 1 *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 591–592. Custis and Rooney, the general's sons, both were officers in the Confederate Army.
- 2 Mary Boykin Chesnut, *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, Elisabeth Muhlenfeld and C. Vann Woodward (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 591–592. Further citations of this text are made parenthetically.
- 3 The other leading candidate for this honor is Ulysses S. Grant, whose *Personal Memoir of Ulysses S. Grant* weighs in at more than 800 pages and that, more

- significantly, is possessed of an elegant, often gorgeous, simplicity of style that offers the Senecan antithesis to Chesnut's Ciceronian elaboration. Grant's masterpiece, however, is in fact a memoir of his military experience during the war – in fact, a biography of the Army of the West and then the Army of the Potomac's failures and progress from 1861–1865 – and not a reflection on his life before the cataclysm or during his presidency.
- 4 Michael O'Brien, "The Flight Down the Middle Walk: Mary Chesnut and the Forms of Observance" in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, Anne Goodwin Jones and Susan V. Donaldson (eds.) (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), pp. 113, 121.
 - 5 Slave owners made up 33% of the Confederate military.
 - 6 See Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing With Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford, 2012).
 - 7 This insight comes from the work of Chesnut biographer Elisabeth Muhlenfeld. See her *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).
 - 8 For an extensive analysis of the scene in Mulberry's black church, see Julia Stern, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) pp. 183–190.
 - 9 Scholars have argued that old Colonel Chesnut is the referent of this accusation raised in Mary Chesnut's original diary jottings, *The Private Mary Chesnut*. I discuss the pros and cons of this theory in my chapter three, "Seeds: Fertility, Flowers, and Fratricide," *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 49–77.
 - 10 On her father's death after the turn of the nineteenth century, old Mrs. Chesnut manumitted all the Philadelphia slaves she had brought to Mulberry. Although not quite an abolitionist, Mary Cox Chesnut spent her adult life devoted to the care of her husband's ailing, parturient, and aging slaves. Mary Chesnut reports that she was beloved in the quarters. Her infamous aversion to "bad odors," broadly construed, kept her at a distance from much in her life, including certain kinds of flowers that "smelled." See "Smells: The Stench of Slavery and Sentiment," chapter six of my *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic*.
 - 11 In the revised narrative, Chesnut mentions several times how much she hates the song "Dixie" and wishes it had not become an informal Confederate anthem.
 - 12 These were volumes for 28 January and 4, 11, 18, 25 February 1905.
 - 13 Stern, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic*, p. 3. Ongoing thanks to James Kibler, professor of English Emeritus of the University of Georgia, for an important conversation about who and in what format Southerners might have read Chesnut in the early twentieth century. I speculate in my book that the notorious scene in which Scarlett orders Mammy to make her a dress from "Miss Ellen's" green velvet "portieres" (floor to ceiling-length curtains) may have

been inspired by a description from a *Saturday Evening Post* excerpt of *The Diary from Dixie*.

- 14 For an extensive discussion of this subject, see chapter nine, "Revolt: Family Troubles in the House Divided," in my *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic*, pp. 207–230.
- 15 The term is historian Nina Silber's. See her *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and Southerners, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
- 16 See Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography*, p. 27.
- 17 See *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic* for discussion of an entry for early June 1861 in which she luxuriates in white bed linen and coffee with rich cream made possible by black bonds women's servitude.
- 18 Chesnut, *The Private Mary Chesnut*, p. 50.

CHAPTER 18

Mark Twain

Neil Schmitz

It was the last steamboat to make the trip from New Orleans to St. Louis. Mark Twain's pilot-days were over. He would have grieved had he known this fact.

Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*

Here is Samuel Langhorne Clemens in action during the Civil War. "Soon a 128-pounder struck our anchor, smashed it into flying bolts, and bounded over the vessel, taking away part of our smoke-stack; then another cut away the iron boat-davits as if they were pipe-stems, where-upon the boat dropped into the water. Another ripped up the iron plating and glanced over; another went through the plating and lodged in the heavy casemate; another struck the pilot-house, knocked the plating to pieces, and sent fragments of iron and splinters into the pilots, one of whom fell mortally wounded, and was taken away."¹ He's in Rear Admiral Henry Walke's *Naval Scenes and Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States, on the Southern and Western Water During the Years 1861, 1862 and 1863* (1877), which regularly names the pilots killed or wounded. No Tom Sawyer, no Huckleberry Finn, no Jim, no Aunt Rachel.

Here is Mark Twain in action at the end of "Old Times on the Mississippi" (1875), positively heroic in his bland gall, staying within genre, doing humorous narrative in this antebellum memoir, not tragedy and horror, staying inside the comic voice of the self-interested person who sees the Civil War only from his/her extremely limited perspective. "[N]ext the war came and almost entirely annihilated the steamboating industry during the several years, leaving most of the pilots idle and the cost of living advancing all the time."²

What audacity to put it this way: first to celebrate the bliss of white Southern mastery, its rank and dignity, in the antebellum slaveholding South, then glumly to admit its defeat by an inglorious consortium of factors (railroads, pilot unions, the war) – to not repudiate the chivalry, still

to assert its just sovereignty. Rank and dignity are also license and liberty. "The moment that the boat was underway in the river, she was under the sole and unquestioned control of the pilot. He could do with her exactly as he pleased, run her when and whither he chose, and tie her up to the bank whenever his judgment said that that course was best."³

Mark Twain is distinctly post-Confederate in "Old Times," retaining a defiant Lost Cause statement, even as he writes the new Southern Unionist text that William Dean Howells was delighted to publish in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Howells's "Old Times" does not refer to volatile sectional feeling, ends before the Civil War, and is lovably funny in its wry self-regard – in sum, a comical Southern writing easily acceptable to Howells's Northern reading public. Mark Twain's "Old Times" gives the literary North permission to enjoy Southern writing, its singularity, its speech, its bristle, as safely inside the logics and imperatives of Unionist (now Republican) discourse. "Old Times" is the new subject of postwar Southern writing, a resource (a subordinate region) and a restriction, nonaggressive humor its necessary mode. In *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) Mark Twain mocks Southern "befo de wah" celebration, but not here, not in "Old Times," with its gorgeous giant river, steamboat life lived in the pilot house, this antebellum slaveholding South a thriving economy, many steamboats plying the river bringing cotton and slaves to New Orleans. Mark Twain carefully steers Clemens around the hidden issue reefs and floating political mines, even as, inexorably, his "Old Times," for all his piloting skill, is headed for the Niagara of 12 April 1861.

A revised post-Confederate "Old Times" is awkwardly joined to the Federal *Life on the Mississippi* by a single slippery sentence: "But by and by the war came, commerce was suspended, my occupation was gone."⁴ The original "Old Times," it will be remembered, ends in the spring of 1861 with pilot Clemens out of work, almost destitute. *Life on the Mississippi* begins 21 April 1882 in St. Louis, Mark Twain boarding the *Gold Dust*, a packet steamer, bound for Memphis. He is a literary star: banquet speaker, comic journalist, four books, concert tours. "Old Times" and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) do redemptive service to the post-Confederate South, report how good life was in slaveholding Missouri, how great, really, before the war. The pilot on the *Gold Dust* promptly lets Mark Twain take the wheel, trusting Mark Twain's ongoing ability to pilot a steamboat on the Mississippi. He immediately affirms Mark Twain's authority just at the beginning of Part Two. The pilot fraternity accepts him, acknowledges his antebellum mastery of the river. Mark Twain still has it. The river, of course, is greatly changed, but he "can steer a steamboat." It is an ebullient

opening. He is going into a postwar South that is greatly changed, one he does not know, and yet he has, by poetic fiat (or so the pilot metaphor declares), deep intuitive knowledge of Southern identity – beautiful losers – has therefore special insight and judgment. At every stop, celebration, special receptions, big news in the local newspaper. He is once again among his Southern people, enjoying their hospitality, accepting their praise, speaking their language, southern English; he is their interpreter, their reporter, and he is secretly contemptuous, no longer of their minority, impatient with the retrospective Southern mindset. He attacks the chivalry: Sir Walter Scott, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, all those Southern colonels, a frontal assault, in his finished report.

It is a tenuous bridge between the parts: the skip of that ellipsis, those three bumpy clauses, the final one, “my occupation was gone.” Mark Twain traverses a conquered country, once his own, his writ of safe passage the humorous character of his literary performance. Mark Twain therefore disconnects himself from young wartime Clemens, the Clemens of “Old Times,” the pilot who was absent from the Civil War, twice gone from his post in beloved southern Mississippi at the hour of its need. Pilot Clemens, part 1, a person of rank and dignity, is a missing person in part 2. Only Mark Twain speaks in part 2. Mark Twain boards the *Gold Dust*, going south, not Samuel Clemens. Every move south from St. Louis brings him closer to the Civil War he hated, the Civil War he fled, to Memphis and Vicksburg and New Orleans. “We were approaching Memphis, in front of which city, and witnessed by its people, was fought the most famous of the river battles of the Civil War. Two men whom I had served under, in my river days, took part in that fight: Mr. Bixby, head pilot of the Union fleet, and [Joseph] Montgomery, Commodore of the Confederate fleet.” A lot of problem is packed into that parenthetical aside, “in my river days.” It silently says: I didn’t serve in either navy in the Civil War at the Battle of Memphis. His river days were not these river days. Later “we passed Grand Gulf and Rodney, of war fame;” next “We passed Port Hudson, scene of two of the most terrific episodes of the war – the night-battle between Farragut’s fleet and the Confederate land batteries.” And then in chapter 35, “Vicksburg during the Trouble,” the citizens of Vicksburg remember the siege, the bombardment, their desperation, with Mark Twain as their faithful correspondent, their objective reporter.⁷

In chapter 26, “Under Fire,” Mark Twain joins the pilot company in the pilot house for whiskey and cigars, and several of the pilots are Civil War veterans. As the steamboat nears Belmont, Missouri, the Battle of Belmont is the subject of the conversation. We can imagine the agitation

of the spirit that such war talk caused in Mark Twain's jovial equanimity. Elsewhere in *Life on the Mississippi* he complains about the tiresome ubiquity of the war topic in social conversation. Not his field, not even for comic reference. What was his Civil War story? Mark Twain's young war-time Clemens was not at the Battle of Belmont. He reports another pilot's Civil War story: "I had often had a curiosity to know how a green hand might feel, in his maiden battle, perched all solitary and alone on high in a pilot-house, a target for Tom, Dick and Harry, and nobody at his elbow to shame him from showing the white feather when matters grew hot and perilous around him, so, to me his story was valuable – it filled a gap for me which all histories had left till that time empty." It happens this pilot was in the Confederate service. His story is the fiercest, truest Mark Twain Civil War story, intensely imagined, antiheroic heroic, an older Civil War Huck Finn speaking. "Mighty warm times – I wish I hadn't come." One pilot hides in the gunboat's hold for the duration of the battle; this pilot wants to flee but there is only one exit from the pilot house, with the captain below managing the battle. So the pilots differently survive, this one to tell the story. Mumford, Mark Twain's convenient interlocutor, suggests the storyteller had a distinguished "subsequent career" as a military pilot, but that is not the story the pilot tells. One battle and he is done. On medical leave, "I got a good many letters from commanders saying they wanted me to come back. I declined, because I wasn't well enough or strong enough; but I kept still, and kept the reputation I had made."⁶

Huckleberry Finn, Civil War pilot. Such is the story Mark Twain puts in the blank of his personal narrative. It does not fill the gap. It is not his story. The ellipsis remains. It is still there in *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (1905):

I was in New Orleans when Louisiana went out of the Union, January 26, 1861, and I started North the next day. Every day on the trip a blockade was closed by the boat, and the batteries at Jefferson Barracks (below St. Louis) fired two shots through the chimneys the last night of the voyage. In June I joined the Confederates in Ralls County, Missouri, as a second lieutenant under General Tom Harris and came near having the distinction of being captured by Colonel Ulysses S. Grant. I resigned after two weeks service in the field, explaining that I was 'incapacitated by fatigue' through persistent retreating (MTA III).⁷

The black hole in his remembered narrative is January – June 1861. Mark Twain's decision not to pilot avoided the challenge that confronted every slaveholding Southern and free labor Northern person in the Confederate and Federal United States. What did honor require?

Clemens was not a Civil War pilot. There is a double desertion. The first one, from the Confederate and Federal river fleets, a refusal to pilot, is serious, dishonorable, unforgivable; the second, from a crypto-Confederate Army, is insignificant, inconsequential, easily forgiven. Mark Twain's official Civil War story is about that second Confederate desertion. All its versions are collected in David Rachels's *Mark Twain's Civil War*,⁸ and one could say of this slender volume, this is Mark Twain's cover story, an agile fiction always shifting in some detail or aspect. There is also the Civil War in *Life on the Mississippi*, the Confederate pilot's war story, the terror, the cringing, the cowering, Huckleberry Finn, Civil War pilot, all those first person narratives in the Vicksburg chapter, mordant citizens remembering life in besieged Vicksburg. The charge in chapter 49, the apprentice pilot swearing the oath is effectively the charge Mark Twain seeks to answer in "A Private History of a Campaign that Failed." The question of pilot Clemens's Civil War service never comes up in *Life on the Mississippi*, although piloting is the text's major metaphor, Mark Twain's warrant, and he is in a postwar South still counting its losses and brooding.

In that critical spring, as David H. Fears's *Mark Twain, Day by Day, Volume I, 1835-1885*,⁹ has it, Mark Twain twice dodged a Federal draft, hid in his sister's house in St. Louis, with military police searching for him. The retreat from any service in the Civil War begins in New Orleans, goes through St. Louis to Hannibal, and ends in the fields of Ralls County. That momentous ascent of the Mississippi in May 1861, the *Nebraska*, the last commercial steamboat to pass through the Federal blockade, shot at, the passengers talking about the war, this slow climb up river must have steeled Clemens's resolve not to serve in either river fleet. All around him, his friends, young men of his generation, were choosing a side. Piloting was his pleasure as a young man and now it was a huge obligation. Somewhere between New Orleans and Memphis, if not before, Clemens deliberated, considered the consequences of his choices, and decided to leave the river, to stop piloting. The Civil War did not take his occupation, did not bring an end to the science of piloting. The Civil War offered Clemens heroic service in its glorious naval battles. On board the *Hartford*, on 5 August 1864, Admiral David Farragut boldly declares to his pilot: "Damn the torpedos, full speed ahead."

In *Mark Twain, A Biography, The Personal and Literary Life of Samuel Langhorne Clemens*, Albert Bigelow Paine helpfully put the question to Mark Twain: What happened January-July 1861, how did you make this decision, what were you thinking? And Mark Twain answered, neatly laid it out. This was his case, his final answer in Honor's Court. "He knew

there was a good deal to be said for either cause; furthermore, he was not then bloodthirsty. A pilot house with its elevated position and transparency seemed a poor place to be in when fighting was going on.”¹⁰ That delicious conditional, “then.” He might now be bloodthirsty. He was not a committed pacifist, like William Lloyd Garrison, the greatly brave abolitionist leader. He was sideless, ideology did not figure in his decision, yet the stated equivalence of forces is a Confederate argument. A good deal to be said for what cause? It is an axiom in Lost Cause writing: the South did not surrender its ethical core. That was what Clemens thought, then, in spring 1861. Confederate discourse had its appeal. But it is the third sentence – Clemens not defying death on his “glass perch” in the pilot house, Clemens not the pilot Admiral Farragut turns to with his famous order – that reveals the reason that matters, and where the case rests in Honor’s Court.

Biography generally accompanies Mark Twain in the course of his explanation. Ron Powers, *Mark Twain, A Life*: “Sam Clemens was not interested in war, at least on available evidence.”¹¹ Fred Kaplan, *The Singular Mark Twain*: “Sam Clemens decided he would excuse himself from service.”¹² Andrew Hoffman, *Inventing Mark Twain*: “Sam did not feel strongly enough about either side of the issue to take up arms.”¹³ But this decision, Samuel Clemens’s *non serviam*, had immense consequences for Mark Twain as a literary artist. It shut down the possibility of sequels for Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. They could not grow up to fight in the Civil War. In 1885, writing the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as he wrote “Private History of a Campaign that Failed,” he mused in his journal: “Put Huck & Tom & Jim through my Mo. Campaign & give a chapter to the Century. Union officer accosts Tom & says his name is US Grant.” They are still boys in Mark Twain’s speculation, Jim easily added. Clemens’s *non serviam* in the spring of 1861 removed the grand subject from Mark Twain’s representation. It was, as it were, off limits. He could not do Civil War battles. That was surely a decree set forth in Honor’s Court, and Mark Twain accepted it. He remembers the charge: “The ‘cub’ pilot is early admonished to despise all perils connected with a pilot’s calling, and to prefer any sort of death to the deep dishonor of deserting his post while there is any possibility of his being useful in it.”¹⁴

In the spring of 1861 Clemens was a Confederate. He was in New Orleans, January 1861, when Louisiana seceded, and promptly, he tells us in “Private History,” “I became a rebel.” His mother, Jane Lampton Clemens, was a fierce secessionist who might well have sent her Samuel off to battle with his shield and some kind of admonition. He was of

the crypto-Confederate Missouri chivalry. Terrell Dempsey's invaluable *Searching for Jim* reads the newspapers and the notices in antebellum Hannibal and vicinity, shows us how intense and violent slavery was in Clemens's first world. The Clemens family was of the slaveholding gentry, Judge John Marshall Clemens aided in the Missouri prosecution and imprisonment of Illinois abolitionists, and yet, for all that, Dempsey concludes with a ringing judgment: "never swore an oath . . . never deserted," pardoning Clemens on a legal technicality. "To call him a Confederate in any sense is simply insupportable." Clemens might have argued he would not pilot for the Union and could not pilot for the Confederacy as his Missouri, his Hannibal, was occupied by Federal forces, honorably in either case. He did not. He makes his case with those three articles, the last of which concerns personal fear.¹⁵

Clemens was a down river pilot, St. Louis to New Orleans. He worked on the same river Walter Johnson describes in his magisterial *River of Dark Dreams, Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (2013), steaming through the night, carrying cotton and slaves down river to New Orleans, the heart of darkness. Midcentury America read Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Life among the Lowly* (1850), knew the steamboat scenes, might have registered what "Old Times" was not remembering, not talking about. Well, there is a "stalwart darkey," a fireman on the *Aleck Scott*, and a "spruce young negro," a barber on the *Grand Turk*. There is reference to the "back streets" of New Orleans, to a "negro ball." Mark Twain does not report seeing African Americans on board as property, shackled, as cargo. Thus, "Old Times" is still Confederate in its blindness to slavery, its willed ignorance, Mark Twain choosing not to report the visual remembrance. He had this glamorous job in a thriving slave/cotton economy. He was in his early twenties, a kind of southern Mississippi Tom Cruise. You can see it in the photography, the cocksure pose, the alert look.

Next, pilots were everywhere pressed into action, some working as private contractors. Pilots are immediately shot to pieces or exploded. At Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, Marsh Ford, James McBride, Frank Riley, William Hinton – all pilots – gone. Horace Bixby, the formidable master pilot in "Old Times," pilots the big ironclad *USS Benton*, Rear Admiral David D. Porter's flagship. Nearly all of Clemens's fellow pilots were in either service: William Hoel, Sam Bowen, Joseph E. Montgomery, and Absalom Grimes – the latter sometimes a pilot, mostly a resourceful Confederate courier who brought Confederate mail to Confederate forces and persons in occupied Missouri. Grimes briefly served with Clemens in the Marion Rangers. In his memoir (posthumously published), Clemens

is an ignoble figure, a whining complainer, a coward. After brief combat, shotguns discharged, three picket guards flee to where Lieutenant Clemens, rear guard, is posted, holding their horses. He is not there. He is already way down the road, riding his mule. "We called to him to halt, and finally Bowen leveled his shotgun and yelled, 'Damn you, Sam, if you don't stop, I'll let her go!' Clemens halted, and when we caught up with him (Bowen still swearing) he said, 'Paint Brush' got so excited I could not hold him.'" In *Naval Scenes and Reminiscences of the Civil War*, reporting the battle at Fort Donelson, Walke writes: "Flag Officer Foote was wounded while standing by the pilot of the *St. Louis* when he was killed. We were then about 350 yards from the fort." The pilot steadfast, standing next to the Flag Officer, steering, 350 yards from the fort. Clemens was not that pilot. Mark Twain's mature Civil War is here in *Life on the Mississippi*, fought in diverse chapters, not in the juvenilia of his Missouri State Guard tales, although they answer the charge.¹⁶

The Civil War factor is huge in Mark Twain's writing, omnipresent, an unhealed wound, so one sympathizes with Rachels in his collection, *Mark Twain's Civil War*. But what are the criteria for inclusion? How does one leave out the public drama of Mark Twain's brilliant rescue of the defeated U.S. Grant, bankrupt former president, or his prolonged seduction of the cadets at West Point, entertaining them with comedic programs, enjoying personal friendships, or any number of relevant passages and sections in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). All Mark Twain's deepest political notions were forged in that fateful spring of 1861. He went outside allegiance, tested the ethics of it, made his case. In *Life on the Mississippi* Mark Twain lets Honor declare there is no instance of a pilot deserting his post to save his life while by remaining and sacrificing it he might secure other lives from destruction." In Pilot's court Clemens could argue he did not desert his post. He was never placed before the wheel, eluding Federal conscription entirely. In Honor's court, Clemens does not raise this technicality. The three pointer he gave to Paine in 1905, elaborated, subtly put, in "Private History," this is the case he makes. It fills in the blank of his absence from the Civil War, but it is not, surely, a winning argument in Honor's court.¹⁷

"... why they didn't do anything ..."

Allegiance is not the subject of Clemens's steamboat soliloquy, whatever it was. In 1861, coming upriver for the last time, he is a scared Confederate patriot. His soliloquy had first to be about honor. What did honor require?

Here is how Forrest Robinson – who has quite the best thing on “Private History” – puts it in his afterword to a 1996 edition of Mark Twain’s *Merry Tales* (1892): “Part of Mark Twain yearned to take a hero’s role in the great struggle that engulfed the nation in 1861. But another part of him—a stronger part, apparently—drew back from the conflict. Was his retreat the act of a coward?” Is it a question, or is the question, what is cowardice, what are the exceptions? Cowardice had to be a prime subject in Clemens’s steamboat soliloquy: the *Nebraska* churning upriver, occupied St. Louis, teeming with military police, his destination. “Mark Twain,” Robinson continues, “must have felt at times that facing that vexed question for the rest of his life was far worse than facing the Union army in 1861. The fear – at times the certainty – that others judged him a coward must have seemed a terrible penalty to pay for a perfectly human – arguably a perfectly rational decision.” All along – young Samuel Clemens, elder Mark Twain, through *Roughing It* (1872), through *The Gilded Age* (1873), and beyond – “that vexed question,” that gap in his life story, is with him. Mark Twain’s postwar generation had to answer the service question. He was a public figure, a celebrity, a trans-sectional entertainer, yet also ineffably Southern. He went bravely to the reunion dinners star studded with the conqueror generals, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and fearlessly addressed them. He had a funny-serious Civil War story, almost a routine, an alibi, carefully calibrated; everything fit, more or less, and he stuck to it, doing versions of it for the rest of his life.¹⁸

“Private History” could be a long piece by Woody Allen. “Private History” is abject before the bar. We are in Honor’s Court, first in the prestigious *Century Magazine*, Civil War veterans everywhere in the United States intently reading the accounts and versions in the documentary series, the just sentence already passed. “Private History” makes a case for clemency, showing the mitigating circumstances, setting up a context, admitting cowardice, never challenging the verdict and the sentence. “Private History” also egregiously sucks up to the High Judge, U.S. Grant, in its summation. The text perspires with bad faith. Robinson: “And if, as most scholars agree, the climactic killing is also a fiction, then there is a kindred variety of moral hedging at large in that episode’s implied condemnation of war, and in its correlative justification for desertion.” It might be the worst instance of contrivance in the text, the one place in “Private History” where Clemens’s desertion, his absence from the Civil War, might be justified, if not ennobled, his cowardice denied.¹⁹

The boy soldiers shoot a mounted stranger whose slow dying revolts Clemens, makes him realize he cannot kill in battle. He does not desert. He refuses to serve. There is a difference, so this story argues, and its language

is solemn. Just here, in this episode, in that statement, "Private History" takes the high ethical ground. Honor grants this exception. Next Clemens is in several training camps, and the high ground is compromised. He sees other units practicing. "The look and style of his comrades suggested that they had not come into war to play, and their deeds made good the conjecture later." At another camp, a "grisly spectacle," twenty recruits practicing with machetes. In their last camp rumor has it a Union regiment is marching on them. The several State Guard units in this camp panic. Should they disband or fall back? Clemens is with the disbanders. Mounted, leaving camp at a fast trot, Clemens and his fellow disbanded rangers meet their commander on his way to their camp. Ordered back to their companies, harangued, they jeer at the commander. "We had done our share; had killed one man, exterminated one army, such as it was; let him go and kill the rest, and that would end the war." The jeer trivializes the solemnity of the earlier exception, used here as part of a derisive alibi, as not true.²⁰

Do not desert your post

Will the comic response, the explanation, change the judgment, find the metaphors, the languages, where the fault can be funny – and how is that done? The main narrative, the tale of the Marion Rangers, is a text always making an exception, its action cued to an argument. It begins with Clemens, master pilot, embroiled in political disputes with a fellow pilot, a Northerner. In 1905 Mark Twain tells Paine, "He knew there was a good deal to be said for either cause." Next he is in the Missouri State Guard, a second lieutenant, shifted into another state of being. The Rangers are boy soldiers, innocent, apolitical. Second exception. Other exceptions follow. The oath is nonbinding, for good legal reasons. The Guard is not yet organized. There is no command structure. Competent leadership has yet to appear. After one engagement and a single fatality, Clemens becomes a conscientious objector. All of these are factors explaining "why they [Mark Twain] didn't do anything" in the Civil War. As a pilot, strictly speaking, he did not do anything. As a soldier, he did do something. This was the only story he could tell at those military dinners. He did do something. "Private History" was an immediate success. The editors at the *Century* happily published it amid the gore of its ongoing military series, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. The conqueror generals were amused. Nobody ever put a white feather on Clemens's plate at a military banquet. His present campaign did not fail. He made his case many times in Honor's severest courts, rising to lift his

champagne glass at this or that Federal military dinner. He fought and refought his Civil War at these tables.²¹

There are, it must be said, genius moves in the first and last paragraphs of "Private History." The droll introduction is immensely confident in its abilities, and the conclusion finds its magic word, its escape clause, in *retreat*. The word does something to *cowardice*, complicates its meaning. Is it possible to retreat from your post? Where is cowardice a wisdom, a knowing, a freedom from life-threatening obligation? The first paragraph plays with these two phrases, "did do something" and "didn't do anything," two different postwar peoples, the latter a minority. The pronouns disperse the power of their referents, the sacrifice, the suffering. Those who "did something in the war," Mark Twain argues, should allow those who did not do anything "to state why they didn't do anything and also explain the process by which they didn't do anything." The question is not asked of Clemens's first refusal to serve, his not piloting gunboats on the Mississippi. What a loss that is. We want that soliloquy. The question is asked of his desertion from Confederate service, and the answer is the exculpatory tale of the Marion Rangers. That tale is special pleading, every sentence aimed to slip a judgment of cowardice. The introduction and the conclusion, the framing sections, admit a cowardice, speak from a different discursive position, freer, not having to argue a case for exemption. Mark Twain speaks in that first paragraph, then Clemens ("Out West there was a good deal of confusion") must explain why he did not do anything in the Civil War.²²

It takes courage to admit cowardice even though the admission is shunted into nonmilitary language, into well put euphemism. There is legal argument for exception in the tale. "Thousands entered the war," Mark Twain writes, "got just a taste of it, and then stepped out again, permanently." Euphemism differently restates an actual social or natural action or event, finds a different language, softer, perhaps transformative. Mark Twain is immediately in a political rhetoric. Why can we not think of cowards as a special interest group, a minority, a constituency, with certain inalienable rights to representation? He changes the rhetorical terrain, we are talking about political rights to speech and storytelling, not the "didn't do anything." It is also a cloaking maneuver, shifting "I" to "they," slipping out of personal focus into general statement.²³

Clemens has a story to tell, his refusal to serve (any longer) in the Missouri State Guard as it reorganized itself as a Confederate military force. He did not, per se, flee battle. Mark Twain returns as the interlocutor in the conclusion. "The thoughtful will not throw this war-paper of mine lightly aside as being valueless," Mark Twain declares. "It has this value."

And what follows is a summary of the argument just made in the tale of the Marion Rangers. In the first month of the Civil War, “many... many... green recruits” decamped, and with good reason, as “Private History” has just pointed out. Just as many, Mark Twain also admits, returned to camp, trained, and fought honorably in great battles. What exactly is the point of that count? The sure consequence of physical cowardice is castration, or the sense of it. Mark Twain briefly confronts it: “My campaign was spoiled. It seemed to me that I was not rightly equipped for this awful business; that war was intended for men, and I for a child’s nurse.” Then he turns back to the “lie” of the murdered horseman, this the action that made him refuse to serve in the forming Confederate army. He puts a position in play, the heaviest judgment made in Honor’s Court, “not rightly equipped.” Lift that: it is the final labor of the last two sentences.

“I could have become a soldier myself, if I had waited.”

“I had got part of it learned; I knew more about retreating than the man that invented retreating.”

The subjunctive is the coward’s mood, “if” the favored conjunction. Irony saturates this sentence: “if I had waited” is like “stepped out again,” an inappropriate phrasing, the best silly construction of running away, of refusing to serve, because it is so obviously a polite nineteenth-century euphemism. Ironic Mark Twain uses the devices of its repression of the ugly untold truth, the unhealed wound, to find verbal escapes, or better ways of bandaging. Soldiers indeed must learn how to retreat in good order on command. We are in the language of education, of the school-room. The Marion Rangers did not get to the grade where charging was taught. All the same, Mark Twain understands Samuel Clemens’s ultimate decision. He has studied “retreating,” our attention diverted from “running away,” and he is a master of that substitution, that deft restatement of the bad thing. Again, “retreat” is softer. We are at last in tall talk, in comic fibbery and outrageous exaggeration. “I knew more about retreating than the man that invented retreating.” This is a strange place to be, the summation of Clemens’s impassioned plea in Honor’s Court. The last two sentences are in flagrant contempt of that court. Lift that, the court has ruled. But he is not there. The judgment misses him. He has retreated from the fixed position and run out of court.²⁴

But bless you I had measured this unconquerable conqueror, & went at my work with the confidence of conviction, for I knew I could lick him.

Mark Twain to William Dean Howells, 1879

"The Babies" is Mark Twain's first major assault on the Union front: November 1879, Chicago, the final toast at a banquet given by the Society of the Army of Tennessee. He does not refer to the Marion Rangers, his Civil War story, although he is working on it. In 1877, at another banquet, he is already pluralizing: "on the spot, my brigade disbanded itself and tramped off home, with me at the tail of it," diverting attention to the value of originality in the statement: "We were the first men who went into the service in Missouri. We were the first men that went out of it anywhere."²⁵ The Putnam Phalanx speech anticipates "Private History," puts the same devices into play, situates itself somewhere between apology and defiance, defensible cowardice and simple dishonor. The speaker selection committee no doubt queried Clemens's war record. What is Mark Twain's standing in the society's conversation, this shared military discourse, generals toasting generals, battles remembered. For six hours Union generals, glass in hand, deliver speeches. The seventh toast is "The Officers and Soldiers of the Mexican War." The eighth toast is "The Memory of McPherson, Blair, and All of Our Heroic Dead."²⁶ So it goes. Mark Twain is the entertainer. The producers put him on last so he could "hold the audience" for the closing ceremonies. His toast is "The Babies," a subject he chose, refusing the assigned toast, "Woman." It was an inspired choice, one that answered his Civil War liabilities, that satisfied a certain demand for his psychosexual abasement (he admits he is no soldier, his expertise is domestic) and yet gave him purchase of a common ground (paternity) with the grizzled warriors surrounding him.

At 2:00 am, standing on the table, lifting his glass, his fellow celebrants "all tired and wretched," Mark Twain gives a breakthrough comic performance, kills the king, U.S. Grant, on his throne at the head of the table, cracks him up, mirth spilling from that stony face. "The Babies" is the text that enables "Private History," that lets Mark Twain into this Civil War subject, lets him write "the death storm of Donelson and Vicksburg,"²⁷ lets him participate in Union triumph. It is the equalizer. He wrote to his wife, Livy: "And do you know, Gen. Grant sat through fourteen speeches like a graven image, but I fetched him! I broke him up, utterly! He told me he laughed till the tears came and every bone in his body ached. (And do you know, the biggest part of the success of the speech lay in the fact that the audience *saw* that for once in his life he had been knocked out of his iron serenity." And to Howells: "I shook him up like dynamite & he sat there fifteen minutes & laughed & cried like the mortalest of mortals. But bless you I had measured this unconquerable conqueror, & went at my work with the confidence of conviction, for I knew I could lick him." As Mark

Perry shows in his *Grant and Twain, The Story of a Friendship That Changed America*, "The Babies" made possible their improbable friendship and subsequent collaboration, Grant's *Personal Memoirs* (1885). "Twain's triumph over Grant complete, the two worked diligently to cement their friendship; they stayed in close touch after the Palmer House banquet, and when Grant moved to New York, Twain came often to see him, and they spent a number of afternoons talking about the war, mutual friends, and Twain's writing career."²⁸ Grant got his notice in *Huckleberry Finn* where, at the beginning, he is the Chief of Ordnance, G. [General] G. [Grant], sternly warning readers not to judge too harshly the "innocence" of Mark Twain's text.

There was heavy rhetorical ordnance at the Palmer House that 13 November 1897. A young Robert (Colonel Bob) Ingersoll, already a celebrated orator, gave a stirring patriotic speech hailing Grant's great phrase: "unconditional surrender," praising Union soldiers as "saviors" and "liberators." Mark Twain first had to meet the sexual insult of his place in the program, last, as well as his assigned topic, "Woman." Another speaker took up the rejected toast and failed miserably, which is where Mark Twain begins. "I like that. We have not all had the good fortune to be ladies. We have not all been generals, or poets, or statesmen, but when the toast works down to the babies, we stand on common ground, for we have all been babies." It is such a deft maneuver: turn the toast around: "The Babies. – As they comfort us in our sorrows, let us not forget them in our festivities." His babies are not weak and vulnerable, a comfort in our sorrows; they are instead screaming tyrants. It is not baby experience he wants to talk about. Here is the common ground: we have all been fathers. You may have been a hero at Fort Donelson or Vicksburg, but you are for all that a slave to infant care, subject to its unrelenting demands. "Sufficient unto the day is one baby. As long as you are in your right mind don't you ever pray for twins. Twins amount to a permanent riot. And there ain't any real difference between triplets and an insurrection." He knew the pain of this paternity and the anger. At the end of the comic monologue on babies, the first part of his speech, Mark Twain is the confederate companion of the members present; his *droit de parler* completely established. He is free to soar into poetic speculation, to confront finally the king himself, that wintry blasted conqueror general, and absurdly reduce him from his monumental stature, his frozen majesty, to a hamstrung grunting infant at work on his extremities, grasping, clutching. Think of all the babies presently in their cradles, Mark Twain advises, suppose "the unconscious Farragut of the future is at this moment teething," screaming one word of baby profanity again and

again. Then think of U. S. Grant as a baby in his crib trying to get his big toe in his mouth, having to work the stumpy stiff baby leg. Baby Grant does not have it in the story, but he will get the big toe in his mouth, Mark Twain assures us. After all, Grant took Vicksburg and then he took Richmond, both after long sieges. The incongruity of that image, baby Grant in his crib, with the grim conqueror general, before them, corpse-like in his rigidity, astonished them all – Grant especially. An interloper, an entertainer with a pronounced Southern drawl, had somehow slipped past all the defenses and touched Grant's soft infant body, a violation of presidential decorum. And there Grant was, surprised, as they all were, that he was so vulnerable, caught unaware, the butt of an absurd joke.²⁹

Mark Twain's speech saved the night for Grant. His first toast, "Our Country – Her place among nations," had one feeble joke about a standing army; the rest was platitude. He sat down to polite applause. It was a failure, a flat opener for a festival of military oratory, as Grant must have known. So he sat silent and drab, his subordinates one by one rising to be witty, well spoken, learned, outshining him. Mark Twain's irreverent slant suddenly made Grant interesting again, brought attention back to him, humanized him, made him for a brief moment funny. Grant was just back from his exhausting, triumphal world tour, being urged to run for a third presidential term. Was there not in the trope of the unreachable big toe the slyest insinuation that Grant might again be president, persist, retake the White House, achieve his desire? Also, because decorum is already breached, the general stripped to his diaper, is there not a sexual signification? All night, the counting of casualties, the dead at Shiloh, at Antietam, and here it was, finally, this other body, the baby's auto-erotic body, baby Grant reaching for it.

Momentous as this was, Grant's outburst of laughter, Mark Twain's instant pardon, it did not lift Honor's ban. Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Jim, have no future in the Civil War. *Roughing It*, 1861–1865, Virginia City, Nevada, San Francisco, California, is Mark Twain's Civil War narrative.

Notes

- 1 Henry Walke, *Naval Scenes and Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States, on the Southern and Western Water During the Years 1861, 1862 and 1863* (1877) (New York: Kessinger, 2010), p. 86.
- 2 Walter Blair (ed.), *Selected Shorter Writings of Mark Twain* (Boston: Riverside-Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 130.

- 3 Mark Twain, "Old Times on the Mississippi," *Atlantic Monthly* XXXVI (1875), p. 721.
- 4 Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Penguin American Library, 1984), p. 166, 184.
- 5 Twain, *Life*, pp. 216, 280, 284.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 192, 193, 194.
- 7 Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1961), p. 111.
- 8 David Rachels (ed.), *Mark Twain's Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).
- 9 David H. Fears, *Mark Twain Day by Day: 1835–1885*, (Banks, OR: Horizon Micro Publishing, 2007), vol. 1.
- 10 Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain: A Biography*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912), vol. 1, p. 161.
- 11 Ron Powers, *Mark Twain, A Life* (New York: Free Press, 2005), p. 95.
- 12 Fred Kaplan, *The Singular Mark Twain* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), p. 83.
- 13 Andrew Hoffman, *Inventing Mark Twain* (New York: William Morrow, 1997), p. 59.
- 14 Mark Twain, *Notebooks and Journals*, 1883–1891, Robert Pack Browning, Michael B. Frank and Lin Salamo (eds.), 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 105, 146.
- 15 Twain, "Private History", p. 207; Terrell Dempsey, *Searching for Jim* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), pp. 203, 272.
- 16 Absalom Grimes, *Absalom Grimes, Confederate Mail Runner* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 10; Walke, *Naval Scenes*, p. 434.
- 17 Twain, *Life*, p. 346.
- 18 Forrest G. Robinson, "Afterword" in *Merry Tales, Mark Twain*, Shelley Fisher Fishkin (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 9.
- 19 Robinson, "Afterward," p. 10.
- 20 Twain, "Private History," pp. 221, 222.
- 21 Ibid., p. 161.
- 22 Ibid., p. 206.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 222, 221, 223.
- 25 Mark Twain, "The Stirring Campaign" in *Plymouth Rock and the Pilgrims and Other Speeches* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), p. 47.
- 26 "Banquet of the Army of the Tennessee, Another Long Speech by the General – the Toasts and the Speakers," *New York Times* (15 Nov. 1879), p. 12.
- 27 "Private History," p. 168.
- 28 Mark Perry, *Grant and Twain, The Story of a Friendship that Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. xxviii.
- 29 Ibid., p. 169.

Replay: William Faulkner and the Civil War

John T. Matthews

"They mought have kilt us, but they aint whupped us yit, air they?"

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Most of William Faulkner's novels are set in his imaginary county of Yoknapatawpha, located in a fictionalized version of his actual state of Mississippi.¹ Over the nearly four decades of his career, from the mid-1920s to the early 1960s, Faulkner composed an elaborate saga of modern life from his vantage point in the U.S. South. His literary domain, for which he once made a hand-drawn map and signed it "sole owner and proprietor," attempts the comprehensive depiction of a single place through more than a century of its existence. Faulkner brought to life a Shakespearean assortment of characters: ambitious but ruthless frontier planters; their wives and children, struggling through generations of the "curse" that descended from those initial acts of hubris; native Americans, clinging to remnants of land once theirs; African slaves, subject to generations of brutality, but determined to be free; small farmers resentful of marginalization and spoiling to see their betters fall – many of these figures scaled as larger-than-life grandees and grotesques.

As Faulkner's generations of characters interact with each other, they also confront historical events that reshaped sharply their regional, national, and global circumstances. Faulkner's literary project from the outset was widely understood as chronicling the South's passage into modernity, its transformation from a feudal agrarian society to one of town mercantilism. Faulkner portrayed a range of attitudes toward such upheaval, from the sense of grief-stricken loss exemplified by the Compson gentry in *The Sound and the Fury*, to the opportunism embraced by the rags-to-riches "redneck" clan of Snopeses, the desperate urgency of women suddenly catching sight of freedom from Southern paternalism, and the setting of African Americans' sights on nothing less than equality at last.

Although the changes associated with the South's entry into modernity center in the 1920s and 1930s, when Faulkner was writing his best-known novels, many of his characters identify the much earlier event of the Civil War as triggering the South's transformation. The literary critic Richard Godden has described this century of change as the South's "long revolution," a series of ruptures through which the South lurched toward a conflicted modernity.² From this standpoint, Faulkner positions the Civil War in his fiction as something like the South's predominant "screen memory." We may think of screen memory as the formation of a recollection about some painful incident, but one that is prominent consciously because it actually blocks or obscures memory of a deeper traumatic event. According to Freud, trauma is a condition constituted by delay, by the postponement of cognitive and emotional processing of an overwhelming occurrence. Combined, the logic of these defense mechanisms captures how in Faulkner the origins of Southern modernity do appear in the break between the pre-Civil War plantation world and the one that followed. Significantly, they also capture how such a break was repressed, psychologically as well as socially and politically, by those who had the most to lose and whose state of denial refused to acknowledge the real reasons for the reversals they had suffered and would not accept.

The Civil War typically appears in Faulkner's fiction as a node for simultaneously acknowledging and disavowing the full import of the South's history. Many of Faulkner's characters possess personal memories of the war, but the memories persist with only partially decipherable meaning and haunt them as unresolved fixations. For example, the first of several narrators in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Rosa Coldfield, decides to break her decades-long silence about the plantation world in which she grew up. She summons her neighbor Quentin Compson in the summer of 1909, just before he heads off to Harvard for his freshman year, to help her investigate recent activity in the all-but-deserted Sutpen mansion. Rosa proves to have been devastated by two fatal incidents she finds inexplicable: the murder of her niece's fiancé by the girl's brother and her own fiancé's insulting proposal that they breed a child together before committing to marriage. Quentin speculates that she's telling him her story "so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War. . . ."³ Quentin withdraws this hypothesis almost immediately, but in his instant of thinking and unthinking the loss of the war as the South's preoccupying motivation for narration, Quentin reflects the logic of screen memory. All the accounts that follow in the

novel likewise attempt to explain the South's failures, while at the same time denying the explanations they offer. Raising and dismissing the question of the loss of the Civil War at the very outset of *Absalom, Absalom!* suggests how the war indicates that a traumatic condition frames the novel's narratives, even if that condition is never wholly grasped. Each teller of the South's cataclysmic history has his or her own solution to the mystery, but the answers to "why" manifest themselves symptomatically – equivocal, partially deferred, receding unstably along chains of linked but discrete hypotheses.

Rosa cannot find plausible explanations for the two catastrophes she's been involved in; she chants to Quentin that the murder was "without rhyme or reason" and only elliptically insinuates what Sutpen must have said that sent her reeling back into spinsterhood. Both these events take place immediately following the South's surrender and, thus, seem to be consequences of the war. The Civil War may have been the event in which the flaws of the Southern design toppled the society built on it, but for many of those most complicit in actualizing that design, memories of the war actually allow them to evade reckoning with the sources of that world's failure. Faulkner understands that a preoccupation with having lost the Civil War is itself a symptom of the inability to acknowledge the beliefs and deliberate acts that built a society "on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage" (209). Only as the novel unfolds do the war's traumatic scenes thicken with narrative elaboration and begin to reveal significance to us as readers that the characters themselves often refuse to see.

Charles Bon arrives to the story of Southern self-making as the embodiment of its fatal contradictions. On the one hand, he's the dreamy ideal of planter civilization – worldly elegance, refinement, cosmopolitan European style, imperial repose – a fantasy figure Rosa falls in love with. For Ellen Sutpen, Charles's prospective mother-in-law, her daughter's fiancé would complete the plantation design, be the touch of luxury and social patina that could drape the violent barbarity of Sutpen's "wild" slaves' having dragged a plantation out of the mud. But Bon also embodies the ineradicably mixed origins of the Deep South's plantation system. His ties to New Orleans evoke wider Atlantic plantation realities: the practice of repudiating creole blood relations not 'pure' enough to count as family; the international slave trade; the Haitian revolution and the expatriation of French fugitives to Louisiana; all the "voices of murdered women and children homeless and graveless about the isolating and solitary sea" (204).⁴

Those ocean cries of slaughtered families bear witness to the savage treatment of women and children throughout the plantation system. Sutpen unfeelingly puts aside his first wife when he deems her racially unacceptable, her outrage simmering for decades as she prepares her disowned child Charles to enact their revenge by seducing Judith. Thus the violence against women – making marriage a rite by which planters consolidated and exchanged property; required chastity as a guarantor of inheritance, and reproduction a duty for the generational transmission of wealth; recruited wives to the labors of plantation administration; and commandeered slave women as sexual conveniences and reproducers of human capital – all inform Sutpen's overly explicit proposition to Rosa. He simply says aloud what the ideology of the system silenced through its fantasies of romance, estate, and female purity.

None of the narrators acknowledge the extensive history compacted in the novel's tableaux of personal violence, nor do they manage to understand that a preoccupation with the catastrophes ensuing from the war is itself a symptom of disavowing the knowledge their narratives actually signify. Even Rosa, the epitome of denial, at one point refers to the murder as "almost a fratricide" (10), as if the South's fatal inherent violence has begun to dawn on her. But the effect of the Civil War as a screen memory is precisely to screen *out*: individuals register tragedy without really processing it, without forming affective and cognitive responses to it, without, that is, working through it. Each of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s retellings of Colonel Sutpen's story arrives at moments of seemingly unsolvable unintelligibility: Mr. Compson constructs his version of the war between the Sutpen brothers, only to wonder if at last "it just does not explain" (80). As Quentin departs for college, Mr. Compson, born into the first generation following the South's defeat, takes the futility of making sense of Southern history as a grand lesson about life's senselessness: "Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought," sounding like someone who will never get past the "lost" in Lost Cause.⁵

For a large class of people in Faulkner's South the loss of the Civil War signifies a personal and social trauma, the loss of a way of life that cannot be accepted. The sentence I quote as my epigraph comes from Faulkner's masterpiece about the plantation South and is spoken by a squatter, Wash Jones, to the county's chief planter, whom he idolizes and who has just returned from the Civil War to find his plantation moribund (152). Wash's attempt at cheering on Thomas Sutpen's determination to rebuild his empire issues in this revealing conceit: that the Confederate South might be dead but not defeated. Obviously, the statement captures the South's

capacity for denial, the sort of crazy contradiction of reality that would lead to the gyrations of Lost Cause ideology, in which the South's loss of the war was interpreted as a sign of the ultimate superiority of its way of life and a reason to hope for its restoration.⁶ Such denial inspires a nightmarish trope in Faulkner's figurative repertoire: the image of creatures that are dead but do not know it. There is the farmer Anse Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*, who, about to lose his land to debt, looks like a steer already struck dead by the maul but yet to feel it, or the galloping steed in the short story "Carcassonne" that has been severed in half on the battlefield but continues its charge. These images of trauma – as delayed registration of mortal injury – symptomize a mentality that denies catastrophic loss, one that Faulkner examines exhaustively throughout his fiction. That power of denial spurs the activities of many individuals following the Civil War who tried to proceed as if nothing had happened. Sutpen and Wash Jones mean to rebuild the plantation world they once ruled, not accept the sort of revolutionary Reconstruction threatened by the federal government's insistence on slave emancipation, ex-slave enfranchisement, land redistribution, and other reforms.⁷ Wash's remark reflects how, in effect, the Civil War never did end for some of the defeated. It is a truism among historians that the South lost the war but won the peace, in the sense that after Reconstruction ended prematurely in the late 1870s, Southern white elites reconstituted themselves, and regional peculiarities like racial segregation actually became the *de facto* norm in much of the North as well.⁸ There is blunt truth in what Wash says, nailed down by his awkward last clause, "air they?" The logic of his syntax would dictate the continuation of the past perfect tense: they might "have kilt" us but they "aint [nonstandard for "have not"] whupped us," "*have* they?" [my emphasis]. But Wash's unexpected use of the present tense marks this war as still being fought.

The Civil War remains ongoing in that individuals fixate on it as justification for their courses of action (or inaction) in postwar times. In Faulkner's other great novel of the plantation regime, *Go Down, Moses* (1942), Isaac McCaslin at one point tries to explain to his cousin why he is relinquishing his title to the plantation he stands to inherit from his grandfather. Ike cites a legacy of abuse – Old Carothers' hubris in believing he could own a piece of nature; the criminality of possessing humans as property; the outrage of slaves used for sexual purposes. The cousins' conversation turns eventually to the question of the Civil War, Ike arguing that the South's defeat was providential, a sign that God intended to save a land for which "He had done so much" already.⁹ God must have thought, "Apparently they can learn nothing save through suffering,

remember nothing save when underlined in blood,¹⁰” and so Ike believes God actually turned his face *toward* the South by letting it lose the war. Cass counters with a catalogue of bad luck and foolish error that hardly seem providential to him, but Ike remains convinced that “He used the blood which had brought in the evil to destroy the evil as doctors use fever to burn up fever, poison to slay poison.”¹¹

Ike uses this understanding of the war to support a stance of political quiescence and to justify his retreat to Nazarene-like hermitage: he theorizes that free blacks should “just endure and outlast [racial oppression] until the curse is lifted. Then your peoples’ turn will come because we have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet.”¹² Casting the war in terms of a theodicy, Ike preserves a lingering narrative of white Southern victimization – easily remobilized later, as we shall see, for the purposes of resisting the modern civil rights movement. Fixating on the loss of the Civil War reflects the self-interest and narcissism of Ike’s account, which makes the Civil War an event of punishment, shame, but eventual atonement for a white society that mistook itself as suffering, rather than inflicting, a curse. The Civil War in Faulkner’s fiction functions as a collective screen memory that blocks access to a full confrontation with the nation’s and region’s colonial plantation history and that continued to obstruct the South’s efforts to accept a set of profound changes overtaking the region and nation through the first half of the twentieth century: desegregation, African American out-migration, the Great Depression, and new rights for women. This is how the Civil War became a 1930s event in Faulkner’s fiction.

Civil Rights and Civil War

In an interview in 1956, Faulkner was asked about the current conflict in the South over desegregation. The Supreme Court had ruled two years earlier that it was unconstitutional for schools to discriminate by race, and one year later ruled that school systems must abolish the practice of segregation. Faulkner acknowledges that it is “bad that there should be a minority people who because of their color don’t have a right to social equality or to justice.” But, he adds, “it is [also] bad that Americans should be fighting Americans. That is what will happen because the Southern whites are back in the spirit of 1860. There could easily be another Civil War and the South will be whipped again.”¹³ Faulkner identifies opposition by a segment of Southern whites to immediate segregation as a long-lingering legacy of resentment over Northern intervention in their affairs. In citing

the Civil War as a way to reckon with this moment of civil rights activism, desegregation, and violent resistance, Faulkner exemplifies how the war continues to function as an unresolved traumatic memory, causing misrecognition, denial, and anger.

Faulkner depicts the Southern instinct to associate African American civil rights with the unfinished business of the Civil War in his novel-like cycle of stories *The Unvanquished* (1938). Coming two years after *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Unvanquished* focuses not, as the earlier novel does, on the creation of narratives about the past but on the immediate experiences of those caught up in the war on home fronts in Mississippi and Alabama. The stories are narrated by the boy Bayard Sartoris, whose father is a Confederate colonel but who has been left behind to fend with his grandmother and their slaves (especially his companion Ringo), as Yankees invade the countryside and the South's defeat becomes incomprehensibly real.

As historians like Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and Glenda Gilmore have shown, the modern civil rights movement in the South has a longer continuous history than once thought.¹⁴ Not just the result of agitation after World War II, which led to the social and legislative achievements of the 1950s and 1960s, activism for racial civil rights gained key footholds during the 1920s and 1930s. *The Unvanquished*, told through the eyes of a youngster confronting disturbing challenges to his worldview, presents a kind of screen memory version of the domestic front of the Civil War and Reconstruction. It is as if the stories' ostensible content, located in the 1860s, is materializing in forms that register the shocks of the 1930s.

At one point in *The Unvanquished*, Granny, Bayard, and Ringo are making their way through the countryside when they notice a dust cloud on the road, a crowd marching somewhere. After sunset they hear it rush by: "feet hurrying, and a kind of panting murmur. It was not singing exactly; it was not that loud. It was just a sound, a breathing, a kind of gasping, murmuring chant and the feet whispering fast in the deep dust."¹⁵

Bayard's delayed recognition snaps into place, and he realizes these are slaves fleeing their plantations and heading toward freedom – toward the river and the Yankee encampment on the other side. One of the fugitives later refers to her determination to cross over "Jordan," making the common comparison of release from Southern bondage to the Israelites' flight from Egypt toward the promised land. To this unsettling human flow Bayard brings the racist dismissal he has grown up with: "the motion, the impulse to move which had already seethed to a head among [Ringo's] people, darker than themselves, reasonless, following and seeking a

delusion, a dream."¹⁶ For Faulkner's characters in *The Unvanquished*, memories of the Civil War block a direct view of the emergent, 1930s civil rights movement and turn the experience of the present into a screen memory fixed in the past.¹⁷

Three new amendments to the Constitution laid out the path to black civil rights in the period immediately following the Civil War: the Thirteenth (1865) abolished slavery; the Fourteenth (1868) guaranteed full rights of citizenship to anyone born or naturalized in the United States; and the Fifteenth (1870) prohibited discrimination in voting rights on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." In most of the South, ex-slaveholders and their dependent classes tried to prevent the enforcement of these measures. In "Skirmish at Sartoris," a story in *The Unvanquished* set immediately after the war, Colonel Sartoris commands the town ballot box and supervises as it is stuffed with white votes to defeat a carpetbagger supported by free blacks, earning the sort of Rebel yell from his reassembled ex-Confederate company that "the Yankees used to hear." The "skirmish" of the title alludes to the war still to be fought on the home front, against Reconstruction's invasion from the North and "Negro" "insurrection" from within. Ringo observes drily, "This war ain't over. Hit just started good."¹⁸

Bayard's momentary failure to identify what he is hearing in the night signals the logic of a trauma, a trauma sustained at the outset by a society misbegotten in racial slavery, screened (out) as the loss of the Civil War in the 1860s, and still incapable of recognizing throughout much of the twentieth century the legitimacy of desegregation and equal rights. The modern civil rights movement in the South eventually became known as the "Second Reconstruction," and some of the action we see in *The Unvanquished* seems pointedly anachronistic. When Granny encounters a young pregnant woman who has been left behind in the flight of the slaves toward freedom, she asks her firmly, "Who do you belong to?" and instructs her, "You go back home, girl." Granny's orders already constitute denial, because emancipation had occurred six months earlier. Her assumption of paternalistic responsibility for, but also authority over, black welfare suggests a mentality that would still be dominant in desegregating Mississippi during the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁹

The Great Migration

The emancipated slaves who make their way toward "Jordan" in *The Unvanquished* enact a metaphorical exodus toward freedom; they are

marching to a Promised Land of equal rights and protection under the law. But they also have been freed literally from their bondage to the soil of Southern plantations. As the company of escaping slaves passes Granny and the boys, they are described as having “blank eyes not looking at anything out of faces caked with dust and sweat” (103). Not only the body of labor but also the land itself is dematerializing before the eyes of the dispossessed planter class. The clouds of dust accompanying the liberated gangs of slaves on the back roads of war-torn Mississippi suggest the disintegration of an entire regime of working the land and producing wealth. A system of land labor that was solid is melting into air, the particulate residue of a razed era coating faces, dissolving, scattering. Yankee soldiers burn down the Sartoris plantation: “The smoke boiled up, yellow and slow, and turning copper-colored in the sunset like dust; it was like dust from a road above the feet that made it, and then went on, boiling up slow and hanging and waiting to die away” (75). The earth itself seems to be in motion. When Granny is laid to rest, the plantation’s soil seems to find a new purpose – funereal:

The earth was loose and soft now, dark and red with rain, so that the rain didn’t splash on Granny at all; it just dissolved slow and gray into the dark red mound, so that after a while the mound began to dissolve, too, without changing shape, like the soft yellow color of the boards had dissolved and stained up through the earth, and mound and boards and rain were all melting into one vague quiet reddish gray. (158–159)

The breaking of bonds to the land also propels freedmen into the arms of the North. Emancipation was intended to liberate slaves to join Union troops on the Southern battlefield. Granny and the boys watch the ex-slaves crowd onto the bridge to freedom, only for them to realize the Yankees do not want them on the other side and plan to blow up the span after clearing it. When it explodes, the witnesses see those who have failed to get back “like little toy men and horses and pieces of plank floating along in the air above the water” (106). Here the hope of transit to Northern territory proves a lethal chimera, an airy fantasy, suggesting white Southern skepticism about black flight northward during slavery, as well as about the subsequent great out-migration during the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰

The white South’s misrecognition of Southern space through the screen memory of the Civil War is in fact the starting point for Faulkner’s one novel dedicated entirely to it. Bayard and Ringo have constructed “a living map” of the nearby town of Vicksburg and the Mississippi River, on

which they play war. They update it as news from the Union siege of Vicksburg in July 1863 trickles in. The white master child's representation of the battlefield transmutes its actual elements into a planter fantasy:

Although Vicksburg was just a handful of chips from the woodpile and the River a trench scraped into the packed earth with the point of a hoe, it . . . lived, possessing even in miniature that ponderable though passive recalcitrance of topography which outweighs artillery, against which the most brilliant of victories and the most tragic of defeats are but the loud noises of a moment. To Ringo and me it lived, if only because of the fact that the sunimpacted ground drank water faster than we could fetch it from the well, the very setting of the stage for conflict a prolonged and wellnigh hopeless ordeal in which we ran . . . between wellhouse and battlefield, the two of us needing first to join forces and spend ourselves against a common enemy, time, before we could engender between us and hold intact the pattern of recapitulant mimic furious victory. (3-4)

Notice how the menace of enemy artillery fades against the "recalcitrance of topography," as if mastering the land is the South's transcendent triumph, its military fortunes hardly worth notice. White master and black laborer work not just harmoniously, but as members of a unified force opposing a common enemy – time. Strife between owner and slave, white and black, even North and South gets annealed here into the "pattern" of fraternal "victory" over the land. This is an unmarked agrarian fable, prophylactically misrecognizing the Civil War as virtually its opposite.

The Great Depression

It is not only freed black laborers in *The Unvanquished* who kick at the dust they had formerly been bound to. Others in the countryside have been set flowing too: marauding white raiders, the former planters themselves, and even Union forces intent on recovering war materiel stolen from them. Southern horse stealers appear as "a dustcloud coming fast out of a lane" (57); Granny's mules "came out of the dust soaring like hawks" (58) when the Yankee soldiers emancipate them; and the smoke from the burning Sartoris mansion, we recall, boils up like dust (75). These are cohorts of stricken white people facing the loss of their farmland, possessions, means of subsistence, pride. When Ringo, Bayard, and Granny pause on their journey to Hawkhurst, they begin "looking at the dust, and the wagon stopped now in the road with the horses' heads hanging and our dust overtaking us again and the big dustcloud coming slow up in the west" (82). Immediately they spot "a white woman and a child looking at

us from a cabin" behind "a burned house like ours" (82). Granny realizes the "white women and children" occupy "nigger cabins where they lived now like we lived at home" (83). "Poor folks," Granny says, "I wish we had enough to share with them." This 1930s Dust Bowl moment hints at the opportunity for migrant mothers to recognize their common plight, but preoccupation with the Civil War and exceptional regional trauma often blocked broader affective and political identifications by Southerners. Of course, that the pathos of fellow white suffering screens out any recognition of the tie to black poverty represented by taking up residence in those "nigger" cabins goes – all too symptomatically – without saying.

The memory of the Civil War led Southerners to imagine that they could address the effects of the Great Depression in a way that differed from the imposition of federal programs under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. In 1938, FDR announced the findings of a report on national recovery confirming that the South remained the country's "number one economic problem." Some Southerners tended to resist what they considered government interference in policies about the size of crops, payments to tenant farmers, and market pricing. *The Unvanquished* identifies a fantasy of Southern regional collectivism meant to avoid two new threatened versions of civil war: class warfare between rich and poor and a second Yankee conquest and reconstruction. Buck and Buddy McCaslin, the twin sons of one of Yoknapatawpha's founding planters, but dissenters who disapproved of slavery, experiment with progressive reform. They implement a communitarian response to agrarian poverty:

It was another side of Uncle Buck's and Buddy's ideas about men and land, which Father said people didn't have a name for yet, by which Uncle Buck and Buddy had persuaded the white men to pool their little patches of poor hill land along with the niggers and the McCaslin plantation, promising them in return nobody knew exactly what, except that their women and children did have shoes, which not all of them had had before, and a lot of them even went to school. (49)

Whatever the genuine benefits to the poor, the system reinforces Southern white plantation paternalism and leads to their dependents revering the brothers "like Deity Himself" (49). Their constituency expresses its loyalty by enlisting in the Confederate army and electing another planter, Sartoris, their colonel. Likewise, Granny, surrounded by a country of suffering wartime households, suddenly finds herself the accidental beneficiary of erroneous Yankee compensation certificates. She and Ringo take full advantage by forging additional copies and raking in Yankee property, much of which she resells to the enemy. It turns out that Granny

is investing the proceeds in an arrangement that provides cash and mule power to the local deserving poor. Like any paternalist overlord, naturally, she keeps track of loans and debts and requires accurate reports from her charges about their efforts.²¹

Such models of indigenous communitarian solutions to economic hardship – which circulated in the 1930s South as calls for a return to yeoman subsistence farming or populist market collectives – are shown to be delusional by *The Unvanquished*. The fragile battlefield coalition of planter officers and landless soldiers collapses, a segment of “dirt farmers” breaking ranks with the McCaslin faction and ousting Colonel Sartoris. Granny eventually pays with her life for believing that all combatants on the Southern field honor a code of gentility toward ladies; she is betrayed by local poor whites who set up her murder in cold blood. Whatever Faulkner’s personal skepticism toward expanding state power and the reorganization of rural life by industrial capitalism, he leaves no doubt in *The Unvanquished* that recollections of paternalistic communal solidarity were a lingering antebellum pipedream.

The Battle of the Sexes

The Nineteenth Amendment extended to women the right to vote. First proposed in 1878, the amendment was not passed by Congress until 1919; it was ratified by 1920. Southern congressional delegates were prominent in opposing the measure and forestalled its approval by Congress for a year. A moment in *The Unvanquished* suggests how the extension of voting rights to women might flashback to earlier scenes of enfranchisement. When Colonel Sartoris and his veterans mobilize during the first days of Reconstruction to block the Yankee carpetbaggers and freed slaves from gaining control of local government through the ballot box, the opposition forces gather at the Sartoris plantation. Two lines form, one “Father’s old troop,” and “opposite them the women” (187). Of course the real lines of division in a town like Jefferson in the late 1860s would have opposed Southerners to Yankees, locals to carpetbaggers, whites to blacks, even ex-planters to new poor white aspirants. But the choreography here seems to involve gender opposition, a division that is immediately explained as marking a distinct difference between the men and women: they “were actually enemies for the reason that the men had given in and admitted that they belonged to the United States but the women had never surrendered” (188). The notion that the women of Jefferson are still fighting the Civil War comments on aspects of the question of Southern women’s

rights in the 1920s and 1930s: such women are portrayed as oblivious to the question of their own female solidarity as they face a line dividing the sexes (an indication that women's enfranchisement will lag behind that of African Americans, as it in fact does by a generation), and they are shown as having closed ranks with their menfolk around resistance to black enfranchisement (an indication of how racial solidarity across gender inequality smothered women's rights in the South with racial fears).

The Unvanquished proves to be enormously interested in the experiments with unorthodox gender and sexual orientations provoked by the social upheavals of total war – that is, war that involves both the domestic home front and the battlefield. More has been written about this topic in the novel than any other, and I will not try to summarize here the great deal that has been learned.²² What I do wish to stress is the connection between the Civil War proper and various attempts at revolting against the prescriptions of traditional gender roles. Drusilla is the principal example: once her fiancé is killed at the Battle of Shiloh, she ditches “the highest destiny of a Southern woman – to be the bride-widow of a lost cause” (191) and insists on going to battle herself, joining the regiment of her cousin Col. John Sartoris. In her kinswomen's eyes this amounts to trying “to unsex herself” (189), but what is so surprising about Drusilla is that she neither gives up her sexuality, nor retains allegiance to a single gender, nor acknowledges communal authority to impose an identity or role on her. Eventually she marries John, but their relationship remains irregular. In an important respect, Faulkner imagines not a woman fighting the battle of the sexes – that is, seeking ratification as her own woman – but an individual fighting a battle against being sexed. The moment feels more like the gender-bending 1920s than the 1860s. Bayard cannot quite comprehend Drusilla, although somehow he manages to use her idiosyncratic commitment to Southern widowhood as an inspiration to repudiate the South's idolized code of honor and revenge. After the Colonel's murder they share an extremely ambiguous kiss – seductive, homoerotic, heterosexual, incestuous, renunciatory, valedictory – as Bayard apprises this “incorrigibly individual woman: not like so many men who return from wars . . . empty of all save an identical experience which they cannot forget and dare not, else they would cease to live at that moment” (229).

Drusilla's immediate reaction to her realization that Bayard is not going to avenge her husband, and his father, by killing the murderer is to erupt into hysterical laughter. Her eyes go “completely empty,” and she shrieks with horror that she has fooled herself into kissing Bayard's hand in tribute to his expected bravery. The drift of the novel's conclusion is to make

it seem that Drusilla has been devastated by Bayard's rejection of the very code she has sacrificed so much to conform to. Even Aunt Jenny, who has backed Bayard's decision to end the cycle of violence, breaks down in equivocal tears for a tradition she loves too much. But the last scene of *The Unvanquished* has Bayard discover a token left by the departed Drusilla, a sprig of her signature verbená. Enigmatic as it must remain, the gesture feels like some sort of peace offering, perhaps some acknowledgment that Drusilla – the Drusilla of war and not the memory of the war – accepts Bayard's willingness to reject the tyranny of mere custom; to create new values, forms of behavior, and narratives; to let the living bury the dead.

Toward the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Shreve replays his own version of Wash Jones's line, but he reverses the sequence and misplays Quentin's arch irony: "Well, Kernel, they mought have whupped us but they aint kilt us yit, air they?" (225). Still, Shreve is on to something, something that might have freed his roommate from what proves to be a lethal past. Once the past is whipped, better to kill off for good the kind of memory that would destroy the present.

Notes

- 1 I wish to thank Nina Silber, my colleague at Boston University, for her invaluable advice on a draft of this chapter.
- 2 Richard Godden, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- 3 William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 6. Further citations of this text will appear parenthetically.
- 4 See George Handley, *Postslavery Literature in the Americas: Family Portraits in Black and White* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000) and Valérie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007) for studies of literary reflections on the violence of New World slavery to family.
- 5 William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 76.
- 6 See Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014) for an authoritative account of the ideology of the Lost Cause in the wake of Reconstruction.
- 7 See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988).
- 8 See Pete R. Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901–1969* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

- 9 William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 273.
- 10 Ibid., p. 273.
- 11 Ibid., p. 248.
- 12 Ibid., p. 266.
- 13 Faulkner, "Interview with Russell Howe," reprinted in *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (eds.) (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 258. The interview proved scandalous; at one point Faulkner warns that Negroes incited to rampage in the South risk being shot down in the streets, even by someone like him who is in favor of desegregation. Faulkner recanted this statement when the interview appeared, insisting that no "sober" man would say such a thing.
- 14 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* (March 2005), 1233–1263; Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (New York: Norton, 2008).
- 15 William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p.83.
- 16 Ibid., p. 81.
- 17 In "'Aghast and Uplifted': William Faulkner and the Absence of History" (*Faulkner Journal* [Fall 2005/Spring 2006], 145–165), Wade Newhouse argues that *The Unvanquished* critiques the assumption that the Civil War can act as "a reliable foundation for modern cultural narrative" (147). Peter Sharpe contends that the novel is a study in a new post-Civil War pragmatic ethics ("Bonds that Shackle: Memory, Violence, and Freedom in *The Unvanquished*," *Faulkner Journal* [Fall 2004/Spring 2005], 85–110).
- 18 Faulkner, *Unvanquished*, pp. 210, 222, 199.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 84, 85.
- 20 See Cheryl Lester on the Great Migration and the invisibility of African Americans in Yoknapatawpha ("Racial Awareness and Arrested Development: *The Sound and the Fury* and the Great Migration (1915–1928)" in *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, Philip Weinstein (ed.) [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995], pp. 123–145) and Richard Godden on the effects of black exodus on the affective life of Southern whites during the 1930s (*William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007]).
- 21 See Ted Atkinson, *Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and Cultural Politics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006) for a discussion of *The Unvanquished* as a Depression novel.
- 22 See Patricia Yaeger, "Faulkner's 'Greek Amphora Priestess': Verbena and Violence in *The Unvanquished*" in *Faulkner and Gender*, Donald M. Kartiganer and Anne Abadie (eds.) (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996): 197–227, and Deborah Clarke, "Gender, War, and Cross-Dressing in *The Unvanquished*" in *Faulkner and Gender*, pp. 228–251.

*Robert Penn Warren's Civil War**John Burt*

The American Civil War was a major theme for Robert Penn Warren from his first poetry in the middle 1920s to a biographical essay about Jefferson Davis in 1981. Between these texts, Warren published a biography of John Brown, two Civil War-focused novels, a book length “tale for verse and voices” about slavery, a book about the legacy of the war, and a dozen poems on Civil War subjects. The meaning of the Civil War is also a major issue in works that do not center on the war as well, such as *All the King's Men*, where an inset short story set in the Civil War era sets the moral tone of the novel. The Civil War is even an important concern of Warren's literary criticism, particularly of his work with the poetry of Melville and Whittier and the fiction of Dreiser, his discussion of other southern writers, and his work as an anthologist. During the Civil Rights era, Warren emerged as a major southern liberal voice, arguing that the South could accept racial integration without fatally surrendering its culture. Warren's texts on Civil War themes record his changing views about race and his embrace of racial integration, but they also record his constant disappointment and disenchantment with the world that emerged from the Civil War and modernity more generally. At his best, Warren articulates a tragic, nonideological vision of the war, seeing it as the result of a conflict between the ideal of justice and the concrete institutions that are supposed to be shaped by that ideal.

The Legacy of the Civil War

Robert Penn Warren's *The Legacy of the Civil War* is, for all its brevity, the most thoughtful and original text to emerge out of the Civil War centennial. It is also the key to five decades of texts Warren wrote about the Civil War, because everything that leads up to that book is either a prefiguration or a rejected early take, and everything that follows it is either a development or a rethinking of the ideas Warren developed in it.¹

Unlike many southern writers of his time, Warren was never in much doubt that the main issue behind the Civil War was the still unresolved quarrel over race and slavery, although he noted that that quarrel played itself out in proxy struggles over the tariff, state's rights, constitutional interpretation, and internal improvements and economic development. The quarrel over race and slavery also became entangled with, and drew into its orbit, a host of other cultural conflicts between North and South, such as over styles of worship, or temperance, or relationships to modernity. Moreover, each side used the energy of the quarrel to fight through other issues as well: the North, for instance, fused a legitimate hostility to slavery with an enthusiasm for monopoly capitalism that clouded, but did not completely undermine, its critique of slavery, and the South, on the other hand, defended the value of an agrarian vision of life, a vision that it partly developed as a way of defending slavery, but that cannot completely be reduced to special pleading about that bad cause. Warren always understood that however deeply these other issues were in play, everyone on both sides understood that slavery was, in Lincoln's words, "somehow the cause of the war."

For Warren, the Civil War was the United States' entry into history and nationhood. By this claim Warren does not merely point out the role that wartime mobilization played in shaping the postwar emergence of the United States as a world power, nor even the way in which the political and social consequences of the war still shape American politics and culture. In calling the Civil War the American entry into history, Warren meant the word "history" to refer to all those things traditional American exceptionalism claims that the United States lacks, chief among them all the shades and shames that go with "having a history." Nations have histories in the way that characters in Hawthorne have stories: to have a story is to be fallen, and to have to wrestle with intractable problems that put all of one's values in question, and to be a nation, as opposed to merely being a state, is to have something one cannot ever quite live down or live past.

Warren also understood that the Civil War has continuing repercussions, that it was only the most violent phase of a long struggle over racial equality and atonement for national guilt that has continued through the Jim Crow and civil rights eras into the present. Finally, Warren always understood that complex realities like the Civil War do not lend themselves to moral fables, that all historical acts take place in a context of false starts, half measures, mixed motives, and unanticipated consequences. Warren recognizes that no historical agent ever acts with

completely clean hands and pure motives, and no historical process ever is completely successful.

America's sense of itself as a nation is, for Warren just as for Lincoln, rooted in the always unfulfilled promises of the Declaration of Independence, which play in relation to the United States the role that shared languages, history, culture, and blood do in other nations. Because the promises are always unfulfilled, Jefferson's promises are, as Warren remarked in an interview with Ralph Ellison, a kind of "burr under the saddle." Under scrutiny, this shared experience of foundational political values becomes a shared experience of bad conscience, and bad conscience is always, in Warren's writings, the foundation of any authentic moral identity.

In *The Legacy of the Civil War*, Warren argues that the conflict over slavery organized itself around two competing absolutisms, which Warren calls "higher law idealism" and "legalism," which still shape American politics and culture and condition how Americans respond to other moral conflicts at home and abroad. Each habit of thought is in a way a disease, but they are capable, for example in the thought and policies of Lincoln, of reconciliation and synthesis.

Warren sometimes treats higher law idealism as the expression of the New England clerisy's resentment at being displaced by business and industry at the center of American culture. That argument is silly – the fruit of southern defensiveness and of nose-thumbing at easy-target stereotypes. More than that, this view of it does not account for the power and temptation of higher law idealism in other hands and in later conflicts and for that matter does not account for the charisma of higher law idealism in Warren's own portrayal of it in this book and elsewhere.

Ultimately higher law idealism matters because it represents a prophetic criticism of existing institutions in the light of higher values, and its risks are a function not of seedy ulterior motives but of the fact that it is very hard to resist the destructive consequences of things that are in themselves very valuable. The danger of the higher law idealist is not that he might be a snob or a narcissist under it all but that if he is thoroughly maddened, it is a virtue that maddens him, and virtues are harder to resist than vices are. Eager to burn through institutions in the name of the values those institutions are supposed to embody, the higher law idealist risks producing only chaos and bloodshed and becomes unable to distinguish between what God commands and what the dark side of his own nature, and of human nature, tempts him to do. Worse yet, the higher law idealist must conceive of his opponent as less than human, as perhaps even demonic,

and can justify almost anything he can do to that opponent in the name of his ideal aim:

The man who is privy to God's will cannot long brook argument, and when one declines the arbitrament of reason, even because one seems to have all the reason and virtue on one's side, one is making ready for the arbitrament of blood. So we have the saddening spectacle of men courageously dedicated to a worthy cause letting their nobility grow so distempered by impatience that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish love of liberty from lust for blood.²

For all the bitterness of Warren's critique, it is hard to deny that Warren feels the attraction of higher law idealism, and indeed higher law idealism is a key theme in much of Warren's fiction.

One might expect that Warren would oppose higher law idealism to some form of organic, worldly, traditionalism, as Edmund Burke did in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), or as southern apologists have done from Jefferson Davis to Allen Tate. But what Warren calls "legalism" does not show the worldly wisdom and skeptical restraint one associates with Burkean conservatism. In the first place, the legal order championed by characteristic antebellum southern ideologues like John C. Calhoun or Roger Taney was not a fount of traditionalist wisdom but a Rube Goldberg legal contraption that, for all their table pounding about how strictly and literally they construed the founding documents, was cobbled together by sophistry to advance the interests of the powers they represented. In the second place, traditional conservatism involves an open-minded detachment about one's own big ideas, but the proslavery ideology demanded and received absolute loyalty at every point. Warren describes legalism not as traditionalism but as a conformity-enforcing system of collective loyalty politics that sees all criticism of the community as betrayal of it. If the higher law men denied the concept of society, the legalists transformed that society into a prison in which even its keepers were jailed. They were proud of what struck them as a rigorously deductive habit of mind, but, as Warren remarks:

[T]he version of society which these egregious logicians deduced so logically from their premises denied, instead, the very concept of life. It denied life in its defense, anachronistic and inhuman, of bondage. It denied life also, and in a sense more viciously, in its refusal to allow, through the inductive scrutiny of fact, for change, for the working of the life process through history.³

What emerged from this clash of absolutisms, Warren argues, was pragmatism, which is, first of all, a respect for the "working of the life process

through history," and which Warren sees as especially manifest in the political and legal thinking of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. One consequence of this pragmatism is the workaday irrationality of the party system that prevailed in the United States from the end of Reconstruction until about twenty years ago; as Warren puts it, Americans had learned that "logical parties may logically lead to logical shooting." At a deeper level than that practice, what emerged from and synthesized legalism and the higher law was the tragic sensibility of Lincoln, who grasped at once the universality of complicity, the necessity of doing the right as God gives one to see the right, and the duty of loving one's enemies. "To be principled without being fanatical," Warren quotes Sidney Hook on Lincoln, "and flexible without being opportunistic, summarizes the logic and ethics of pragmatism in action."⁴

But postwar pragmatism also had, in Warren's view, a dark side, embodied in the naturalistic brutality of Holmes's thought (which Warren uses to characterize the postwar world not only here but also in his 1971 *Homage to Theodore Dreiser* and in his 1974 Jefferson lectures, *Democracy and Poetry*).⁵ Warren's critique is rather darker than the critique of materialism and corruption that Twain had made in *The Gilded Age* (1873) or Whitman had made in *Democratic Vistas* (1871), because it involves an intellectual subjection to natural process and an enthralled fascination with force. This dark side energizes the works of the literary naturalists and appalls Henry Adams in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918). It is perhaps best summed up in Holmes's statements that "every society rests on the deaths of men," and "Between two groups of people who want to make inconsistent kinds of worlds, I see no remedy but force."

Just as, in Marx's adage, history repeats as farce what happened first as tragedy, so Warren's two themes also have an afterlife in American culture. Higher law idealism is reborn as the "Treasury of Virtue," which assures those who draw on it that, having once been in the right about a very big thing, none of their other vices much matter. Northerners might be tempted to believe, for instance, that the virtue of freeing the slave more than completely pays in advance for the guilt of America's replacing the oppression of the slave with the oppression of the industrial worker. And legalism has an afterlife as "the Great Alibi," by which southerners, under the spell of their own myth of the Lost Cause, can disavow responsibility for whatever they do, and "any common lyncher becomes a defender of the Southern tradition."⁶

The Treasury of Virtue and the Great Alibi also have, Warren argues, an afterlife in American historiography, with the southern tradition

embodying itself in the view that the Civil War was the easily avoidable error made by a blundering generation of politicians, because slavery was bound to have ended anyway had not those meddling abolitionists interfered, and with the northern tradition embodying itself in the view that the Civil War was a historical inevitability, so that all of its bloodshed and folly can be subsumed into the benign logic of the course of history.

The key ideas of *The Legacy of the Civil War* underlie much of Warren's best literary criticism, from his underrated books about John Greenleaf Whittier and Theodore Dreiser, to the masterful historical notes he provided for *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*.⁷ Nowhere is that logic more in evidence than in Warren's writings on Melville, particularly his treatments of Melville's *Battle-Pieces* (1866) and *Clarel* (1876). In Melville, Warren found a writer whose ironic intelligence and tragic sensibility he completely shared.

John Brown: The Making of a Martyr

John Brown: The Making of a Martyr,⁸ Warren's first book, was a neo-Confederate revisionist biography resembling other contemporary books by Warren's friends, such as Allen Tate's *Stonewall Jackson: The Good Soldier* (1928) and *Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall* (1929) and Andrew Nelson Lytle's *Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company* (1931). Tendentious and thinly researched, it contributed little to the historical literature about Brown, but it did get a respectful notice from Allen Nevins, and it was written with verve.

The book's thesis about Brown is peculiar, because Warren developed contradictory ways of discrediting Brown. He is mostly presented as a con artist, an incompetent businessman with a string of bad debts and sharp practices. But Warren also sees him as someone who sought to redeem himself in his own eyes by embracing fanaticism about slavery, as if the Dauphin from *Huckleberry Finn* were not only to set himself up as a traveling evangelist but also to see himself as an actual prophet. Warren wants to see Brown both as a charlatan and as a fanatic, but he can never quite decide whether he aims to unmask the fanatic as a charlatan or to see Brown's fanaticism as an attempt to escape his own charlatanism. Warren treats the gravity of Brown's final days chiefly as evidence that he had come to believe his own hype. Warren's own chapter on Brown's last days, however, endows Brown with a kind of dignity that belies his thesis.

Warren is particularly interested in the contrast between idealist motives and brutal consequences, a hallmark of his critique of idealism

and ideological thinking everywhere in his career. Warren juxtaposes the hagiographic fictions of James Redpath about Brown's adventures in Kansas Territory with a suitably graphic account of the actual murders and dismemberments Brown committed at Pottawatomie Creek. Warren's treatment of the Harpers Ferry raid itself centers on some of the ironies of the event, such as the fact that one of the first casualties of the raid was a free black man, the baggage handler at the railway station. Warren's focus is always on the bloody price of big words, and that focus gives this book some value beyond its southern special pleading.

All the King's Men

The Cass Mastern episode, an inset short story in *All the King's Men* concerning the subject of the protagonist Jack Burden's failed PhD dissertation, is in context a presentation of the ethos of responsibility Jack painfully learns in the course of the novel, but it is also as thoughtful a meditation on the South's legacy of defeat and guilt as any writer of the Southern Renaissance produced.⁹

Cass Mastern, born in modest circumstances in rural Georgia, is brought to Mississippi by his brother Gilbert, who has become a rich plantation owner and a neighbor of Jefferson Davis. Struck by his brother's intelligence (but also a little contemptuous of his dreamy cast of mind), Gilbert sends Cass to Transylvania College, in Lexington, Kentucky, apparently to study classics. There the naive but thoughtful young man befriends Duncan Trice, a well-to-do young banker. After a long pursuit Trice's wife Annabelle seduces Cass, and they carry on a very torrid secret affair for some months. Ultimately Duncan Trice dies, apparently as a result of an accident while cleaning his pistols, but just before his death he had taken off his wedding ring and left it on his pillow, as a secret signal to his wife that his death was not really accidental.

The wedding ring, however, was discovered not by Annabelle but by her slave Phebe as she turned down the bed covers on the night of the suicide. Annabelle, unable to stand Phebe's gaze, knowing what Phebe knows about her, sells her to slave traders. The theme of the slave's gaze, the slave's ability to see through the moral pretenses of the master, and the slave's ability to repeatedly confront the master with the evidence of his or her guilt, is a major element in Warren's understanding of the moral dynamics of slavery, both here and in *Brother to Dragons*, his book-length poem about the murder of a slave by two of Thomas Jefferson's nephews in Kentucky in 1811.¹⁰

The betrayal of Phebe, in which Cass is complicit, shocks Cass into recognition. He knows that Phebe will be sold down the river to be sexually exploited. Racked with guilt, he tries but fails to find her. Despairing, Cass returns to Mississippi, determined to atone for his sins. He is unable to work his plantation with free labor, and finally frees all his slaves and sends them north, to what he knows is an uncertain future. When the Civil War breaks out, Cass cannot fight his region but cannot fight for slavery either. Understanding himself to be burdened with a guilt he can never fully atone, of which even the fullest acknowledgment always seems somehow inauthentic, he enlists as a private in the Confederate army, but chooses never to fire his weapon. He is wounded outside of Atlanta and dies in a filthy military hospital there. His final letter to Gilbert, with its unmistakable echoes of the Lincoln Second Inaugural Address, is an eloquent statement of the ethos of responsibility and complicity that Warren endorses in *The Legacy of the Civil War*.

Band of Angels

Band of Angels is a "tragic mulatta" novel set in the Civil War era. It is somewhat underrated in Warren's oeuvre, because of the romance-novel cast of its plot, which turns on some wildly improbably reunions, and because of the weakness of Warren's development of his principal character. The novel's portrayal of slaveholding society is dated and defensive as well, but the novel does treat Reconstruction-era politics with a great deal of nuance.¹¹

The protagonist, Amantha Starr, is the daughter of a Kentucky planter who is ambivalent enough about slavery to send her to Oberlin College, an abolitionist hotbed. After her father dies suddenly Manty discovers, at the grave of her father, that she is racially mixed. Her father's major creditor seizes her during the burial service to sell her south to repay her father's debts. Manty winds up the property of Hamish Bond, a charismatic but self-hating Louisiana planter, who hides from his lower-class origins under an assumed name, and has a dark history of involvement in the African slave trade.

Bond, of course, falls in love with Manty, and his emotional hold over her is such that she is unable to take advantage of several opportunities he gives her to escape. Bond is an idealized slaveholder, closer perhaps to the Rochester-like figures who haunt popular historical romances than he is to actual historical slaveholders. But this is because he seeks some individual kind of redemption from his past as an illegal slave ship captain

than because Warren has an idealized view of slavery. Bond has with him as his protégée and oversee a young man named Rau-Ru (whom he had rescued during his traumatic last voyage as a slaver) with whom he has a complicated relationship as protector and betrayer. Rau-Ru's ultimate alienation from Bond registers Warren's critique of the idea that one might redeem one's self as master by good behavior, and in the crosscurrents of Reconstruction politics, Rau-Ru finally winds up causing Bond's death.

In occupied New Orleans, after the collapse of her relationship with Bond, Manty meets Tobias Sears, who falls in love with her. Sears, an idealistic, decent-minded, Harvard-educated officer from a prominent abolitionist family who chooses to command black soldiers, is a figure whom Warren might have criticized earlier in his career by searching for clay feet or an Achilles heel. But Warren treats Sears very sympathetically here, and in some ways he is more the protagonist of the story than Manty is, because he represents all the promise and all of the limitations of the most progressive thinkers of the war era. His commitment to his black troops is deep, and he serves with them at some cost to his advancement. Warren has even made Sears a friend of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, of the legendary Massachusetts 54th, and has his troops desperately but successfully rally after being surprised by Forrest's Confederate cavalry, who was killing everyone who tried to surrender. This last detail was particularly daring for Warren to include, because both of Warren's own grandfathers rode with Forrest, and one was present at the notorious Fort Pillow massacre in 1864, when Forrest's soldiers engaged in one of the few indisputable war crimes of the American Civil War. Warren also has Sears and his men fight bravely at the battle of Port Hudson, the battle so vividly described by that other great novel of occupied New Orleans, John W. De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867).

Warren's portrayal of Reconstruction politics is complex, and not one dictated by the reconciliationist paradigm. Sears is genuinely committed to black suffrage and also bitterly opposed to the repressive black codes that that government sought to impose, and fears that the new order may simply reestablish a version of the ancien régime, with gang-labor for wages under coercive conditions replacing outright slavery. Through Sears, this is to say, Warren distances himself from the traditional southern account of Reconstruction, which argues that the Union should have restored white supremacy without slavery and allowed the prewar elite to resume its position but instead imposed black rule on the former Confederacy out of vindictiveness and power hunger. Sears favors neither the hard peace of the radicals, nor the easy peace of Presidential

Reconstruction, but rather a compromise that features both black suffrage and political reconciliation, which, it is fair to say, was a pretty tall order.

Sears's views in the run-up to the great race riot of 1866 are divided. The existing state regime is unjust, elected by a minority under Lincoln's original 10 percent plan, and in favor of "black laws" and a "nothing but freedom" version of emancipation. But it is also the technically legitimate government. The radicals' constitutional convention, which will bring in a new government over the existing state government's head and in the face of its resistance, stands for what justice requires; however, it is also extralegal, and technically a revolutionary regime. This kind of conflict between law and justice is the central one in most of Warren's political works, such as *All the King's Men* (1946) and *World Enough and Time* (1950), and for that matter it is the same conflict between the proslavery Lecompton and antislavery Topeka governments in Kansas that Warren described in *John Brown: The Makers and the Making*.

Meanwhile, Sears's integrity drives him deeper and deeper into failure. Fleeing Louisiana after the collapse of Reconstruction, he practices law in St. Louis but loses his practice when he writes a book bitterly denouncing the betrayal of the freed slaves by the Compromise of 1877. Embittered into alcoholism, and into a series of infidelities, Sears moves with Manty from one dusty small town in postwar Kansas to another. They are only reconciled when Sears stands up for the interests of a black ragpicker, who had been a decorated Union soldier, against a small-town aristocrat who, it turns out, had been a bounty-jumper during the Civil War. Sears of course does not solve the problem of Reconstruction and could not have been expected to. But battered as he is, he at least comes out of the novel with his wife's (and his creator's) respect.

Wilderness

Wilderness, Warren's most detailed and passionate treatment of Civil War subjects, was underrated at the time of its publication because of its darkness and cynicism, but it has recently been subject to a sympathetic reevaluation by the historian David Blight, who, in *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era*, praised its tragic depth and its avoidance of Blue-Gray clichés.¹²

The protagonist, Adam Rosenzweig, an idealistic German Jew with a crippled foot, burning with the spirit of the 1848 revolution and revulsed by his once-heroic father's recantation of his support for that revolution, sails to the United States in 1863 to fight for freedom. He arrives in the midst

of the New York City draft riots, the worst civil disturbance in U.S. history, in which a largely Irish-American working class mob, enraged about the draft (and egged on by a disloyal city government) destroyed draft offices, burned a black orphanage, and killed as many random black men as they could lay their hands on. Adam himself barely escapes with his life and is rescued from a flooding basement by an escaped slave named Mose Talbutt, who delivers Adam to his wealthy uncle Aaron Blaustein, who is dying of grief for a son killed at Chancellorsville.

Rejected by the army, Adam travels south with a sutler's wagon financed by his uncle and driven by a southerner named Jed Hawksworth, who had earlier saved a black man from lynching. Hawksworth and Talbutt have a twisted relationship, however, because Hawksworth is at the same time both close to Talbutt and a vindictive racist who enjoys baiting him. Finally they wind up in the hutment of the army of the Potomac on the banks of the Rappahannock, where Meade's army spent a disconsolate winter after the failure of its post-Gettysburg offensive.

The scenes of camp life are hyperbolically seedy, and Warren spends a great deal of time dwelling on the cruel and thuggish racism of the Union soldiers. One scene, in which black soldiers, their hands tied behind their backs, are made to grub with their mouths for dollars hidden in a large tub of flour, seems to owe something to the Battle Royal scene in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The relationship between Hawksworth and Talbutt deteriorates, and just as general Grant arrives to take command someone recognizes Talbutt as a Union deserter. Hawksworth makes Talbutt strip to reveal the "W" the army branded in his thigh for desertion, and, humiliated, Talbutt later that evening murders Hawksworth.

In the confusion of the departure of all the sutlers from the camp, Adam manages to slip away and coerces a Confederate deserter to lead him over the Rapidan into the Wilderness just as the battle of the Wilderness is opening. Adam is resting in a glade when he is surprised by eight ragged Confederates. A Union detachment arrives, and a wild struggle with the Confederates ensues, during which Adam shoots a Confederate soldier. Taking the boots from the dead soldier, which Adam discovers had earlier been taken from a dead Union soldier, Adam understands that violence in the service of an ideal looks rather different in reality from how one might have imagined it. It is important to note that Adam does not doubt that he was right to oppose slavery, or even that he was right to kill in the name of ending it. What was wrong was a romanticized idea of what violence in the name of ideals is like. He would do the same thing, he says, "but with a different heart."¹³

Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back

Warren's last Civil War text, *Jefferson Davis gets his Citizenship Back*, is a meditation on the life of the Confederate president. Half of the interest of the book is the sidelight Warren casts on his main subject. For instance, the book provides Warren's most detailed portrayal of Gabriel Thomas Penn, who figures in many of his poems ("Court-martial" for instance). From this book we learn that Gabriel Penn was no enthusiast for slavery, skeptical of secession, and very critical of Jefferson Davis's leadership. We also see the old man's chilling, firsthand account of the Fort Pillow massacre. Warren presents as well his amusing childhood confusion between Jefferson Davis, the Confederate president (born in Warren's own Todd County) and Jefferson Davis, the alcoholic local ragpicker who figures repeatedly in Warren's fiction and poetry (for instance, in "Blackberry Winter," "Convergences," and "Recollection in Upper Ontario, from Long Before"). The book also recounts, in amusing and touching detail, the 1979 celebration Todd County put on at the Jefferson Davis birthplace on the occasion of President Carter's restoration of Davis's U.S. citizenship.¹⁴

As Warren's last treatment of Civil War themes, *Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back* is a bit disappointing, because Warren pays no attention at all to the conflicts about slavery and race that are key to almost everything else he wrote on the subject. He even goes so far as to play with some traditional Confederate Civil War pieties: secession was not treason, Union victory was mostly a function of its willingness to engage in total-war brutality, Lincoln's pragmatism was chiefly a cavalier dismissal of traditional legal structures like habeas corpus, the freedom of the press, and so on.

The emotional center of the book is its treatment of Davis's dignity under harsh imprisonment (an odd echo of *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr*) and the self-serving vindictiveness of his captor at Fortress Monroe in Virginia, General Nelson A. Miles. Warren portrays Davis very much the same way he portrayed Joseph in *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce*, and their common mistreatments at Miles's hands are very similar.¹⁵

In both books General Miles, who not only abused and cheated the Nez Perce but also commanded the troops that put down the Pullman Strike, is seen not so much as a Civil War figure as a representative of the ethos of the Gilded Age, which Warren here and everywhere views with skepticism as an era of materialist grasping and shallow values, much like the present. If the treatment of Civil War themes in *Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back* is thin and unsatisfactory, it is because the book is

really not about the war itself but about Warren's disenchantment with the society that emerged from the Civil War – a disenchantment rather like that he also felt about the society that emerged from the Second World War. The Jefferson Davis that Warren describes here is not so much the leader of the Confederacy as a lone, stubborn, and failed holdout against a shabby modernity, rather like Chief Joseph. Seeing the Confederacy as a kind of holdout against an alienating modernity is the one aspect of Warren's Civil War writings that is consistent throughout and the one aspect of Warren's Civil War writings that owes something to the values of his agrarian beginnings.

Notes

- 1 Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1961).
- 2 Warren, *Legacy*, p. 20.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 43, 18.
- 5 Robert Penn Warren, *Homage to Theodore Dreiser, August 27, 1871-December 28, 1945, on the Centennial of His Birth* (New York: Random House, 1971); Warren, *Democracy and Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).
- 6 Warren, *Legacy*, p. 54.
- 7 Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks and R.W.B. Lewis, *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* (New York: St. Martins, 1973).
- 8 Robert Penn Warren, *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr* (New York: Payson and Clarke, 1929).
- 9 Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946).
- 10 Robert Penn Warren, *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices* (New York: Random House, 1953).
- 11 Robert Penn Warren, *Band of Angels* (New York: Random House, 1955).
- 12 Robert Penn Warren, *Wilderness* (New York: Random House, 1961); David Blight, *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- 13 Warren, *Wilderness*, p. 310.
- 14 Robert Penn Warren, *Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980).
- 15 Robert Penn Warren, *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* (New York: Random House, 1982).